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A HISTORY  
OF THE BLACKFEET INDIANS

by

Blanche O'Hara

Presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts

State University of Montana

1934

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DEDICATED  
TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY PARENTS



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	The Home of the Blackfeet . . . . .	1
II	Division of Tribes . . . . .	10
III	How the Blackfeet Lived. . . . .	19
IV	Social Organization. . . . .	41
V	Mythology and Religion of the Blackfeet . . . .	53
VI	The Importance of the Beaver . . . . .	64
VII	The Scourge of the Smallpox . . . . .	80
VIII	The Bison or Buffalo . . . . .	87
IX	Horses of the Blackfeet . . . . .	103
X	Dogs as Beasts of Burden Among the Indians . . .	118
XI	The Blackfeet in War . . . . .	123
XII	Governmental Relations . . . . .	140
XIII	The Treaty-Annuity-Agency System . . . . .	149
XIV	Westward Expansion -- Land Cessions of the Blackfeet . . . . .	161
XV	Last Frontier of the Blackfeet . . . . .	165
XVI	Summary . . . . .	173

## **Chapter I**

### **THE HOME OF THE BLACKFEET**

Man, in his going to and fro, engraves upon the world a record of his movements. Thus the roads he builds are, in fact, inscriptions, which the wise eye may read. And these traces which his feet have etched persist with a curious stubbornness, whether they were in the beginning the broad paved highway of the Roman or merely narrow forest tracks beaten deep by the feet of Indian warriors long ago. Yet unless these thoroughfares are kept in repair and tended, they will by and by begin to disappear, just as the inscriptions on an ancient tombstone are blurred by eroding time. And thus in order to assist in preserving the thoroughfares of a once proud and mighty people, I am presenting at this time a history of the Blackfoot Nation.

Among the earliest accounts of the Blackfeet, one perhaps is given precedent, that of David Thompson, who

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spent a winter among them in 1787-88 on the south side of the Bow River in Canada. This account based on Thompson's experience among the Piegans, also relates the story of Asukamapee, an old Piegan chief, and carries the history of the Blackfeet back to 1730, the time of the Blackfoot-Snake<sup>1a</sup> war. This is considerably beyond

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1. David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America. Ed. by J. B. Tyrrell. (Toronto, 1915) pp. 324-25. "In October 1786, six men and myself, were fitted out with a small assortment of goods, to find the Peegan Indians and winter with them. We found a camp on the south side of Bow River."
- 1a. David Thompson, op. cit. pp. 327-28. "His name was Asukamapee; his account went back to about 1730, and was as follows: The Peegans were always the frontier tribe upon whom the Snake Indians always made their attacks . . . There were a few guns among us, but very little ammunition. Our weapons were a Lance, mostly pointed with iron, some few of stones, A bow and a quiver of Arrows; . . . We were about 350 warriors . . . They (the Snakes) sat down on the ground, and placed their large shields before them: We did the same, but our shields were not so many, and some of our shields had to cover two men. . . . On both sides several were wounded. Our iron arrow heads did not go through their shields, but stuck in them; night put an end to the battle, without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days, such was the result, unless one party was more numerous than the other. The great mischief of war then, was as now, by attacking and destroying small camps of ten to thirty tents, which were obliged to separate for hunting . . . I grew to be a man, became a skillful hunter. By this time the affairs of both parties had changed; we had more guns and iron headed arrows than before; but our enemies the Snakes and their allies had Miss-tutin (Big Dogs, that is Horses.) We had no idea of horses and could not make out what they were."

any previous authentic record. A little later, or about 1790, these Indians were found by Mackenzie occupying<sup>1b</sup> the upper and middle South Saskatchewan, with the Atsina on the lower course of the same stream, both tribes being apparently in slow migration toward the Northwest. This would make them the vanguards of the Algonquinian movement from the Red River country.

Within the recent historical period, until gathered upon reservations, the Blackfeet held most of the immense territory stretching from the Saskatchewan River, Canada,<sup>1c</sup> to the waters of the Missouri River in Montana, and from about longitude 105° to the base of the Rocky Mountains. With the exception of a temporary occupancy by invading Cree, this extreme northern region has always, within the historic period, been held by the Athabascan tribes.<sup>2</sup> The tribe is now settled on three reservations in Alberta, Canada, and one in Northwest Montana, about half being on the international boundary.

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- 1b. Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages. (London 1801) 2 vols. vol. 1, p. cl-exiii. "I have reason to think they are travelling Northwest . . . On the head-waters of the South Branch (Saskatchewan) are the Picaneaux, . . . Next to them are Bloods of the same nation, . . . from them downward extends the Blackfeet." p. exi.
- 1c. Thirty-Third Cong. 2nd Sess., Ex. Doc. No. 1, Report of Sec. of Interior, p. 402, contains report of Gov. Isaac Stevens.
2. Frederick Webb Hodge, Handbook of American Indians, 2 vols. in Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30, pt. 2, p. 570.

The country formerly roved over by these tribes covered about twenty million square acres including the valley of the Saskatchewan, and the headwaters, south and west of the Missouri River. But the Executive order reduced their territory to a tract along the northern boundary of Montana, bounded by the Marias and Sun Rivers, and the State line of Dakota, deprived the Indians of much of their best hunting grounds, and left the agency outside of the reserve.

This was indeed a glorious country, the home of the Blackfeet. Here were great mountains and broad prairies. To the west the mighty Rocky Mountains lifted their snow-clad peaks above the clouds. Here and there, were smaller ranges, from north to south, and from east to west, green with pine, blue with spruce, and gray with a peculiar rock formation that runs through this section.

Between these ranges lies the vast prairie, monotonous indeed to the eye of the stranger, but covered with bunch-grass which afforded rich pasture for the buffalo and the antelope. At intervals there are green winding river valleys, as it is watered by the upper affluence of the Milk, Marias, Teton and Sun rivers, and the bluffs crowded close upon the rivers, are seamed with ravines and gullies as are all the river bluffs along the Missouri.

The Blackfoot country is especially favored by the warm chinook winds, which insure mild winters and little snow. Over this vast domain, the bison were found in countless numbers. Elk, deer, antelope, mountain sheep and bear without number were there. In those days sheep were to be found on every ridge and along the bad lands far from the mountains. In the early years of the 19th century, this country is said to have been the richest beaver country in the entire west.

The neighbors of the Blackfoot were the Crows on the north, the Assiniboin on the east, the Crows on the south, and the Salish, Kutenais and Snakes on the west and southwest. The Salish and Upper Pend d'Oreilles or Kalispells were also horse Indians like the Blackfoot, and engaged in the chase in order to secure food. But the Blackfoot were prairie Indians, seldom going into the mountains, except when they crossed them to war with the Salish, Snakes or Kutenais.

They subsisted almost wholly on the flesh of the bison.. They were hardy, untiring, brave and ferocious. They had conquered and driven out of the territory which they occupied the tribes who once inhabited it, and they maintained a successful warfare against all invaders, fighting with the Crows, the Assiniboin, the thieving Crows of Absarokas, the wandering Snakes or Shoshoni, the

religious Salish or Flatheads, and at times the Gros Ventres, and the fur traders and trappers on the Missouri as well. In those days the Blackfeet were rich and powerful. The bison fed and clothed them, indeed their wants were supplied by the bison and the horse. This was their time of success and happiness.

As far as history and tradition go, the Blackfeet have been roving bison hunters, dwelling in teepees and shifting periodically from place to place within their above mentioned territory, without the pottery art or canoes, and without agriculture excepting for the sowing and gathering of a species of native tobacco. They also gathered canoe roots and sarvis berries in the foothills.

Descendants of the Algonquin linguistic family, distinguished for noble tribes, stalwart warriors and a high aboriginal development, the Blackfeet constituted a powerful nation, a fierce, proud, and haughty tribe. They were one of the great Indian peoples of the Northwest, with thousands of lodges, and holding by force of arms, their hunting grounds about the headwaters of the Missouri and Milk Rivers. They were an intelligent, and when aroused, an extremely warlike people. Indeed, the battles between these antagonistic

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4. Frederick Webb Hodge, op. cit. p. 570.

forces were of the fiercest kind, and when there was an encroachment on their hunting grounds sanguinary fights followed.

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Their number in the early day was estimated at about 14,400, and they were divided into a number of small bands. With two of the bands in particular the trader became intimately acquainted, although for exactly opposite reasons of which we shall later learn.

These red men had rarely known defeat in battle, and considered themselves the aristocracy of the fighting tribes of the whole vast Rocky Mountain country. Their war parties had ranged from the Saskatchewan on the north as far south as Salt Lake, and not a tribe that inhabited that great area but knew and feared the raids of the Blackfeet.

As to the origin of the name Blackfeet, there are several traditions, but it is commonly believed to have reference to the discoloring of their mocassins by the ashes of the fires of the prairie; it may possibly have reference to the black-painted

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5. Thirty-Third Cong., 2nd Sess., Senate Doc. No. 1, p. 402. Sec. of Interior. Report of Gov. Stevens. "My enumeration derived from consulting all reliable sources of information in the Upper Missouri, which made the four tribes of the Gros Ventres, Bloods, Pieguns and Blackfeet amount to 14,400."



moccasins such as were worn by the Pawnees and other tribes.

Wheeler in his "Trail of Lewis & Clark" states that after separating themselves from the main tribe on the Saskatchewan River in their migrations southward, they traversed a wide district over which a prairie fire had swept, that their moccasins became much blackened, and that the Ojibwa upon seeing them in this plight, called them Blackfeet.

Crimmell, to the contrary, relates in his "History of the Blackfeet" that the origin of the name can probably never be determined, though it is commonly stated that the Blackfeet were so named because their moccasins were always discolored by the black soil of the country where they lived, or from the black surface of prairie recently burned over; but this is a mere guess.

According to Hamtreville in his "Twenty Years Among Our Hostile Indians", he attributes the origin of the name Blackfeet to the fact that they wore moccasins and leggings in winter made from the skins of black animals tanned with the hair on; the moccasins made for summer use were also blackened, and the tribe was in consequence invariably known as the Blackfeet.

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6. Frederick Webb Hodge, op. cit. pt. 2, p. 570.
  7. Crimmell, George Bird, in The American Anthropologist, Apr. 1898.
  8. J. Lee Hamtreville, Twenty Years Among Our Hostile Indians, (New York, 1887), p. 217.

In the sign or gesture language of the Indian, it was customary for tribes linguistically different to identify themselves and others by signs designating the characteristics of body or dress. The Blackfoot identified himself in this gesture language by touching his moccasins and rubbing his fingers upon something black.

"Should you ask me whence these stories?  
Whence these legends and traditions,  
With the odors of the forest,  
With the dew and damp of meadows,  
With the curling smoke of teepees,  
With the rushing of great rivers,  
With their frequent repetitions,  
And their wild reverberations,  
As of thunder in the mountains?  
I should answer, I should tell you,  
From the prairie of the Blackfoot,  
From the lodges of the beaver,  
From the hoof-prints of the bison,"  
From the volumes of great authors,  
From a Northwest History teacher."

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9. Frederick Webb Hodge, op. cit., p. 557.

## Chapter II

### DIVISION OF TRIBES

As to the division of the tribes of the Blackfoot Nation there appears to be a diversity of opinion even greater than that concerning the origin of the name.<sup>10</sup> Some authors mention three, others four, and a number mention as many as five sub-tribes.

According to the account of the Blackfoot Nation found in Chittenden and Richardson "Father De Smet's Life and Travels Among the North American Indians", the Blackfeet are divided into five principal tribes, numbering about sixteen hundred souls -- the Piepans, the Bloods, the Blackfeet proper, the Sarcees, and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie.<sup>10a</sup> The Gros Ventres and

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10. Thirty-Third Cong., 2nd Sess., Senate Doc. No. 1. Report of Sec. of Interior, p. 408.

10a. Chittenden and Richardson, *Life and Travels of Father De Smet Among the North American Indians*, 4 vols. (New York, 1903) vol. 3, p. 246.

the Sarcoes speak a distinct language, entirely different from that of the other three Blackfoot tribes.

However, in consulting the "History of Western Missions and Missionaries" by Pierre J. De Smet, the author inclines to the belief that the latter account is more accurate. An excerpt of one of Father De Smet's letters<sup>11</sup> is given below.

Father De Smet further states that the Piegans are the most civilized, due perhaps to the relationship of their people with the Salish. However, this tribe was noted for their thieving among the whites as well as among the various Indian tribes. The Bloods have excellent physiques, and are generally less dirty. It is said that the Blackfoot proper are the most hospitable.

However this may be, these four tribes are not half of what they were before the contagion of the small-pox introduced among them by the whites about 1837. At the

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11. Pierre J. De Smet, History of Western Missions and Missionaries. (New York, 1856) p. 256. "The four tribes of the Blackfoot, Gros Ventres, Piegans, Blood-tribe, and Blackfoot-proper. These four tribes may contain about a thousand lodges, or ten thousand souls. The Gros Ventres of the Prairie are a branch of the Papagoes, who roam over the plains of New Mexico, and those of the Platte and Nebraska Rivers. They separated from the nation a century and a half ago on account of differences between their chiefs. The Gros Ventres gave me this information. The Gros Ventres are improperly ranked among the Blackfoot; besides they did not originate in this country, they do not speak their language, and are different in many respects."

time of this account in 1837, women constituted more than <sup>12</sup> two-thirds if not three-fourths of their number.

There were included under the general name Blackfoot <sup>13</sup> four distinct tribes or bands: The Blackfoot proper (Siksikas), the Piegiens (Pikuni), the Bloods (Kainah), and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie or Falls Indians (Atsina), numbering all told about 14,000 souls. Early writers mention also Sursies and the Little Robes, but these two bands were not prominent in the tribal history of the nation. The Piegiens were peaceably disposed to the whites as a general rule, and the first successful trading post established in Blackfoot territory was built at the mouth of the Marias river in 1838, the usual habitat of this band, and was honored with their name, Fort Piegan. It was with the Piegiens that the principal trade in that part of the country was <sup>14</sup> conducted.

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12. Pierre J. De Smet, op. cit., p. 253.

13. Hiram Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, 3 vols. (New York, 1902) vol. 2, pp. 281-88.

14. Ibid. Kenneth McKenzie in his account of the establishment of Fort Piegan states: "The Piegan band of the Blackfoot is warmly attached to our interests. They are the beaver hunters of their nation. The other bands trade robes and provisions principally."

The Gros Ventres were also called Falls Indians, from the fact that they lived near the Falls of the Saskatchewan. In season they were called Blackfeet by the traders and trappers, and very few understood their tribal relations. Their own language was difficult to acquire, and as they understood the Blackfoot language they always used it in their intercourse with the whites. This tended to confuse the distinction between the two tribes, and accounts for the fact that so many of the hostile acts of the Gros Ventres were charged up to the account of the Blackfeet, and has created the impression that the Blackfeet were a particularly warlike people. An example of this is the trouble Captain Lewis experienced in the return trip from the West in the summer of 1806. The Indian killed at that time by Lewis was a Gros Ventres<sup>15</sup> and not a Blackfoot.

Next to the Gros Ventres, the Bloods seem to have been the most troublesome to the traders. They were very hostile, but their wanderings did not bring them into contact with the whites.

As their several bands roamed over much the same territory it is difficult to place them in a single habitat; but generally the Aikikas dwelt northeast in the valley of the Milk river; the Bloods near the

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15. J. C. Jacobs, The Life and Times of Patrick Gass, (Wellsburg, Virginia) 1886, p. 108.

source of the Milk and Marias rivers; the Pieguns west of the Missouri along the lower course of the Marias, and the Gros Ventres along the south shore of the Missouri from the Great Falls to the Judith Basin, although some authorities place them north of the south fork of the Sanicatchewan.

All of the Blackfeet bands belonged to the predatory class of Indians, and their wanderings were very extensive. Also their territory was constantly being invaded by surrounding tribes, and they lived in an almost perpetual state of warfare. Another source of trouble with their neighbors was the fact that the Judith Basin was one of the most popular buffalo regions in the entire west, and the tribes beyond the mountains, such as the Snakes, Nez Percés, and Salish came annually to this buffalo ground for their supply of meat and robes.

In the Henry-Thompson Journal <sup>16</sup> may be found the following classification of the Blackfeet: "The Blackfeet of our text are the Aiksika proper, who have long formed and still constitute, with the Bloods and the Pieguns, a great confederation. A part of these Indians occupy an extensive reservation in northern Montana, from the Rocky Mountains eastward to the

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16. Henry-Thompson Journal, ed. by Elliott Coues, in ~~How Indians of the Northwest~~ ~~History of the Northwest~~. (New York, 1897) 3 vols. Vol. 2, p. 522.

region of the Marias and Milk rivers. A majority of these Indians are Piegan.<sup>17</sup> The language is the same among the three tribes; they constitute the Siksika division of the great Algonquian family."

In a research covering many sources as to the division of the Blackfoot Nation I have found a rather recent one by a full-blooded Blood chief, namely, Buffalo Child Long Lance,<sup>18</sup> residing on the reservation at Alberta, Canada, which gives the reason for the division in detail.

The Bloods and the Piegan tribes of Alberta are identically the same as the Blackfeet, together with the South Piegans of Montana. They became split up into these so-called tribes about 150 years ago, as a result of a buffalo shortage on the Northwest plains. These tribes were one at that time, with a head chief whose three sons were minor chiefs of these three bands of the tribe -- all tribes were divided into two or more bands under minor chiefs, for war purposes, much the same as a military division is divided into brigades.

No buffalo had come north that year, as a result of

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17. Henry-Thompson Journal, p. 524. "The Henry copy wavers in spelling 'Piegan'. Some of the forms are Pigan, Peigan, Peegan, Peiken, Peagan."
18. Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance is a graduate of Carlisle; was appointed to West Point by President Wilson in 1915; became a captain in the Canadian army during the World War. (Mentor Magazine, March, 1924.)



a swifthing of the warm chinook winds to a more southerly course. The big tribe was facing starvation during the coming winter. The head chief called his three sons together. He instructed the chief of what are now the Blackfeet to go east with his band, and not to return until they had located a herd of buffalo. He sent the band now known as Bloods south with the same instructions, and he dispatched what are now the Pieguns westward. None but the aged and infirm remained with the head chief to await their return.

Months afterwards the band known as the Blackfeet, having veered far to the north and crossed an immense stretch of country burned by a prairie fire, returned to the head camp with their mocassins jet black. Following out the universal Indian habit of renaming things according to circumstances or characteristics on momentous occasions like this, the head chief forthwith called this band the "Siksikas" meaning "Blackfeet". The band that is now called the Bloods was the next to return. During their long absence they had acquired a wide reputation as dangerous fighters, having time and again defeated all their enemy tribes to the south, and spread disaster among all that crossed their path. The chief called them the "Ai-nais" meaning "Bloods". The Pieguns were the last to return. They had grown to like their separation so well that they refused to join

the parent body again, and the Chief called them the "Pia-neas" meaning "Cut off or separated", which has been corrupted by English pronunciation to "Pie-gans".

Henry Youle Hind<sup>19</sup> in his "Report of the Assinaboine & Saskatchewan Exploration Expedition" of 1859 states:

"The Blackfeet nation is divided into four distinct tribes or bands as follows: The Blackfeet, the Bloods, the Pie-gans, and the Gros Ventres, totaling about 12,500 souls."

There were, then, included under the general name Blackfeet four distinct bands with which this paper will deal: The Blackfeet proper (Siksikas), the Pie-gans (Pikuni), the Bloods (Kainah), and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie or Falls Indians (Atsina), numbering all told about 14,000 souls. Early writers mention also Surtees and the Little Hohen, but these two bands were not prominent in the tribal history of the nation, and these two bands together with the Gros Ventres were not of the confederation, but were allies of the Blackfeet only. By the fur traders these Indians were all included under the general term Black-

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19. Henry Youle Hind, Report of the Assinaboine & Saskatchewan Exploration Expedition, (Toronto, 1859) p. 112.

feet, for they dwelt in the same country, spoke similar<sup>a</sup> dialect, and much resembled each other in personal appearance. These tribes banded together for protection, and what was the trouble of one was the difficulty of the other. Not alone the whites but the Indians also suffered from them. The religious Flatheads or Salish, the proud Nez Percés or Chopunnish, the thieving Crows or Absaroka, the wandering Snake or Shoshone, the Crows, all were at feud with the Blackfeet, largely, it seems because the Blackfeet persisted in protecting their hunting grounds from encroachments.

### Chapter III

#### HOW THE BLACKFEET LIVED

The clothing of the Blackfeet was made of the beautifully dressed skins of certain animals, preferably of the bison,<sup>20</sup> deer or elk. Women seldom wore a head covering. Men, however, in winter generally used a cap made of the skin of some small animal, such as the antelope, wolf or badger. As this is the region of the elaborate ceremonial feather bonnet, the cap at times was made of the skin of some large bird, such as the sage hen, duck or owl. The men of the tribe wore a shirt or tunic

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20. Chittenden, op. cit., p. 817. "Dr. F. V. Hayden, who visited the Upper Missouri several times between 1860 and 1866 states. As near as I can ascertain, besides robes which are traded to the whites by the Indians, each man, woman and child requires from one to three robes a year for clothing. Skins of the female buffalo only are used for robes."

of bison or deerskin, extending below the hips, the edges of which were generally fringed. Leggings<sup>80a</sup> reaching to the thighs, moccasins, and a breech-cloth were, of course, worn.

The garments<sup>80a</sup> of the women were very striking, consisting of a long sleeveless gown or smock, reaching from the neck to below the knees. This was confined at the waist by a broad belt, and the whole garment was frequently ornamented with dyed porcupine quills woven in designs. However, the primitive quills later gave way to the glass beads of the white man's commerce.

George Catlin, who was with the Blackfeet for some period of time during the year 1832, tells of their primitive clothing and gives this description:<sup>81</sup>

"There is no tribe, perhaps, on the continent, who dress more comfortably, and more gaudily than the Blackfeet, unless it be the tribe of Crow. There is no great difference in the costliness or elegance of their customs; nor in the materials of which they are formed, though there is a distinctive mode in each tribe, of stitching or ornamenting with the porcupine quills, which constitute one of the principal ornaments to all their fine dresses,

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80a. Stevens, op. cit., p. 411.

81. George Catlin, The North American Indian, 3 vols. (Rainburg, 1903) vol. 1, p. 34.

and which can be easily recognised by any one a little familiar with these modes, as belonging to such or such a tribe. The dress of the chief consists of a shirt or tunic, made of two deer skins finely dressed, and placed together with the necks of the skins downwards, and the skin of the hind legs stitched together, the seams running down on each arm from the neck to the knuckles of the hand; this seam is covered with a band two inches in width, of very beautiful embroidery of porcupine quills, and suspended from under the edge of this, from the shoulders to the hands, is a fringe of the locks of black hair which he has taken from the heads of victims slain by his own hand in battle. The leggings are also made of the same material; and down the outer edge of the leg, from the hip to the feet, extends also a similar band or belt of the same width, and wrought in the same manner, with porcupine quills, and fringed with scalp-locks. These locks of hair are procured from scalps and were worn as trophies. His moccasins were of buckskin, and ornamented in a corresponding manner. And over

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28. George Bird Grinnell, Blackfoot Lodge Tales. (New York, 1913) p. 197. "Moccasins were made of tanned buffalo robe, and were often decorated over the instep or toe with a three-pronged figure, worked in porcupine quills or beads, the prongs, it is said, representing the three divisions of tribes of the nation."

all is his robe, made of the skin of a young bison bull, with the hair remaining on; and on the inner or flesh side, beautifully garnished with porcupine quills, are the battles of his life very ingeniously, though rudely portrayed in pictorial representations. His pipe, the stem of which is four or five feet long, and two inches wide, was curiously wound with blades of the porcupine quills of various colors; and the bowl of the pipe ingeniously carved by himself from a piece of red steatite of an interesting character, is procured, so the Indians all say, somewhere near the Yellowstone mouth, and the Falls of St. Anthony on the head waters of the Mississippi."

This famous Red Pipestone quarry is located in southeastern Minnesota. There is a tradition connected with this "sacred quarry"<sup>23</sup> where pilgrimages were performed by the Indians to procure this stone. Indeed, all the tribes of the Mississippi, and some of the Missouri as well, were in the habit of going to that spot, where they met their enemies, whom they were obliged to treat as friends, in accordance with a message from the Great Spirit.

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23. Personal observation of the author.

"The women in these tribes are decently dressed, and many of them with great beauty; their dresses are all of deer or goat skin, extending from their chins quite down to the feet; these dresses are in many instances trimmed with ermine, and ornamented with porcupine quills with exceeding ingenuity. Later they were ornamented with glass beads from the trader. They clean them by rubbing them with white earth. (It is the soap of the savage.)

Necklaces and ear-rings were worn by all, and were of shells, bone, wood and the teeth and claws of animals pierced and strung together. Elk teeth were highly prized and were used for ornamenting women's dresses. A gown profusely decorated with them was worth two good horses. The leggings extended from the feet to the knees, below which they were fastened by a quilled garter."

24  
The faces of both men and women are generally painted

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24. Hamanlian's Travels in North America 1838-39, Ed. by Reuben Gold Thwaites, in Early Western Travels 1742-1846 (Cleveland, 1906) vol. 23, p. 99. "The blackest paint their faces red with vermilion; this color which they procure by barter from the traders, is rubbed on with fat, and gives them a shining appearance. The vermilion costs the Indian very dear, for the Company supply it from their stores at ten dollars a pound."



with vermillion, which seemed to be the national color.

In regard to the hair, the men usually wore it in two long braids, one on each side of the head falling forward over the shoulders. The women divided the hair on the forehead and painted the separation with vermillion or red earth.

Physically the restless aggressive Blackfeet had developed an unusual degree of beauty and symmetry. Though of less stature than the Crow as a rule, the men had broad shoulders and great expansion of chest. The women were quite tall but not so good-looking as the men. Their hands were large, coarse and knotted by hard labor; and they early became wrinkled and careworn. Their fine physical appearance was commented upon by a number of early visitors.

"They are robust, generally well-made men, and some of the women and girls are very pretty. The men are partly broad shouldered and muscular, partly of middle stature, and thick-set. One of the Blood Indians measured over six feet eleven inches English measurement. The Big Soldier was five feet ten inches two lines, French measure. Their legs and arms are more slender than those of the Whites, but this is by no means a general rule. Their hands and feet are, for the most part, small, of a bluish-brown color like the

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Brazilians, with whom, evident traces of this affinity appear in all the North American Indians. Their nose is often slightly curved or bent downwards, frequently long and thin, almost like those of the Jews, and the nostrils not extended. Their eyes are mostly hazel, yet I saw one Piacan with a light bluish-gray circle round the iris. Their hair is jet black and generally stiff; their beard is not thin, but is carefully plucked out. I never saw any with bald heads."

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"The Bloeds dress more neatly and are finer and bolder-looking than the Blackfeet, who in turn surpass the Piegans in these respects. The Bloeds are said to have among them many comparatively fair men, with grey eyes, and hair both finer and lighter-colored than is usual in the case of pureblood Indians."

David Thompson, who spent a winter among the Piegans in 1787-88, comments on their excellent physical appearance as follows:

"They are a fine race of men, tall and muscular, with manly features and intelligent countenances, the eye large, black and piercing, the nose full and generally straight, the teeth regular and white, the hair long, straight and black. Their color is somewhat like

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25. Maximilian, op. cit., vol. 23, p. 98.

26. H. M. Robinson, The Great Fur Land, (New York, 1882)

that of a Spaniard from the South of Spain, and like that of a Frenchman from the south of France, and this comparison is drawn from seeing them bathing together. Their complexion is rather swarthy, although they frequently have fair skins and grey eyes, with light hair."

As a rule the children were hardy and vigorous. They were allowed to do about as they pleased from the time they were able to walk. Until the age of seven years, they went bare-footed and half-naked. Under such conditions, those that had feeble constitutions soon died. Only the hardiest reached maturity and old age. Thus a process of selection was constantly going on, the effect of which was no doubt seen in the general health of the Macaese.

The Indians never chastised their children, especially the boys, thinking that it would dampen their spirits, check their love of independence and cool their martial ardour, which they wished above all things to encourage. "Reason", they say, "will guide our children when they come to the use of it; and before that their faults can not be very great." They avoided compulsory measures, and allowed the boys to act with uncontrolled freedom; but endeavored by example, instruction and advice to train them in diligence and skill in hunting; to animate them with courage, patience, and fortitude in war; and to inspire them with contempt of danger, pain,

and death.-- qualities of the highest order in the  
estimation of the Blackfeet.<sup>27</sup>

The Blackfeet like all Indians were full of prejudice and superstition. They undertook nothing without first invoking their guardian spirit who mostly appeared to them in a dream. When a young Indian desired to choose his guardian spirit, he retired to the wilderness, fasted for three or four days, and there in solitude awaited the message of the Great Spirit which would reveal to him his guardian spirit.

This custom was a rite of the most solemn sacredness and secrecy, and was shrouded in mystery. It was not usually made by young boys before they had been on their first war journey. Those who underwent this rite were obliged to fast or abstain from food and drink for several days and nights.

After dark the young Indian took his way cautiously far off into some unfrequented place where few or no humans had walked; it must be also a place that tried the nerves, where there was some danger. Such places were mountain peaks, or cut cliffs where a careless movement might cause him to fall to his death on the

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27. William V. Moore, Indian Wars of the United States,  
(Philadelphia, 1840) p. 412.  
28. Grinnell, op.cit. p. 191-192.

rocks below. Here he remained for long hours praying and waiting for the Great Spirit by whose revelations he would learn wherein his powers lay. Perhaps this "medicine" would be conveyed to him in a dream, and having received his message he went forth to find the animal that would thereafter be his mantle. Sometimes it was the bison, the elk, the wolf, or other beast of his native haunts. Into his bag he put a tooth, or claw and some of the fur of the chosen creature, and with it some herbs that might be medicinal.

Such was his charm, his medicine-bag, the source of his safety, to be worn at all times, to be guarded with his life, and to go with him in death to the Great Spirit by whom it had been revealed.

If a warrior lost his medicine-bag in battle, he became an outcast among his people, and the only means for retrieving his honor was to kill and take from an enemy's body the medicine-bag which replaced his own.

The only way for an Indian mother to carry her <sup>28a</sup> infant was to wrap her blanket about her in such a way as to leave some slack at the back, and in this she deposited her infant and carried him about. The Indian mother also made a cradle or nest of a robe or skin that was carefully lined with a thick layer of dried moss. This was soft and fine. The baby was

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28a. Personal Observation of the Author.

covered with this downy stuff, the robe drawn over and around it and tied with a thong. In traveling the mother could carry it on her back, place it on a travois, or hang it by a noose over the pommel of the saddle.

The Indian baby rarely cried. He learned early that it was useless to cry, for if he did so, his mother tweaked his nose so he could not make any noise worth while, and he soon gave up. He learned while still an infant to make the best of his lot, and <sup>was</sup> inured to hardships and endurance from infancy. Children, it is said, usually ran naked until about ten years of age, though they commonly wore moccasins to protect their feet.

Though the Blackfeet were fond of their children, they were not given to showing their affection toward them. They seemed to regard them with total indifference until such time as the youth was old enough to enter the list of warriors, and the girl was old enough to be salable as a wife.

The lodges or tipis of the Blackfeet, for this is the region of the true tipi, <sup>29</sup> (tipis differ from wigwams) made of long poles erected in a circular form at the bottom,

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29. Dr. Harry Turney-High, Elementary Anthropology, (Missoula, 1932) p. 11. "This is the region, and the only region of the true tipi, a conical skin tent supported by spreading pole. P. 13. The wigwam is found in the northeast Woodland; a dome shaped lodge constructed of a ring of saplings bent and tied to a common center, and covered with oats and bark. This is not a portable structure."

and resting against each other at the top, were covered with buffalo skins, and later with the white man's canvas, carefully tanned and smoked with rotten wood that it might not sarden after being wet. It was supported by poles twenty-five feet in height, with an apex at the top through which the smoke escaped and the light was admitted. These lodges requiring about eighteen skins, lasted about a year. They were at first beautifully white, afterwards brownish, and at the top where the smoke issued forth, black, and, at last, transparent, like parchment. The door, three or four feet high, was covered by a flap of skin, which hung down on the outside. In the center of the lodge a fire readily kindled by rapidly turning one piece of smooth wood upon another gave cheer, and threw its flickering shadows on the walls which were often gaily decorated with trophies of the hunt. Furry robes piled high made restful couches, and the lodge was comfortable even in the coldest weather.

Often the chief's life story was narrated in the sign writing on the walls of the lodge. It was all there, plain to the Indian reader, the battles he had fought, the men he had killed, and the horses he had stolen.

The owner of the lodge always occupied the seat or couch directly opposite the doorway, the place on

his right being reserved for his wives, ( the usual number was four, Irving ), and daughters. The place on his left was reserved for his sons and for visitors,-- the visitors being seated according to rank, -- the nearer to his host, the greater the honor.

These lodges were taken down in a few minutes by the women when they wished to change their location, and were easily transportable to any part of the country where they wished to encamp; and they generally moved some six or eight times in the course of the summer,<sup>30</sup> following the immense herds of buffalo as they ranged over the vast plains from east to west and from north to south.

The weapons of the Blackfeet were the bow and arrow, the tomahawk, ( stone hatchet ) and knives or short spears. Bows were made of ash wood which was not so satisfactory as the yellow wood from the Arkansas river, which they obtained by barter. These bows which were about three feet long were lined on the back with layers of bison or deer's sinews which gave them great elasticity, and were powerful weapons in the hands of the blackfeet. With the gun, on the contrary, they were said to be in-<sup>30a</sup> different marksmen. These bows were also made

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30. Catlin, op.cit., p. 49.

30a. Maximilian, op.cit., p. 118.

31. Catlin, op.cit., p. 36.



of bone and of the horn of the mountain sheep, the latter being more valuable, the price of which was a horse or two.

The arrows were made of wood about three feet long and were tipped according to the use for which they were intended; for small game, bone was used to tip the arrow, but for war and bison hunting, flint was used, and later iron and steel. The shaft of the arrow was always feathered to guide it. Each man marked his arrows by painting them or by some special combination of colored feathers.

All Blackfoot, both men and women carried a knife in a sheath attached to the belt, and were dexterous in its use. The knife was their constant companion, and was used for slaughtering animals, scalping enemies and for general purposes. It was made of the ribs of the buffalo, rubbed to a keen edge. Knives were later bought from the traders.

His shield, the Blackfoot made of the toughened rawhide of the bison bull's neck, dried by smoke, and hardened by glue boiled from bison hoofs. Usually circular in shape, it was often painted and decorated with tribal designs, and though of a very light weight on the left arm, it was said to be arrow proof, and turned obliquely, "it deflected the shot of

of the old smooth-bore rifle."<sup>32</sup>

These primitive children of the Plains were quite skillful in the art of dying; they made their own paint, red, brown, yellow and white, by burning clay of these colors, which were pulverized and mixed with a little grease. Black paint was made of charred wood. Also some plants could be used for coloring as the lemon-colored moss from the fir tree, and certain roots supplied a red dye.

To produce the beautiful yellow color, they employed a lemon-colored moss from the Rocky Mountains, which grows on the fir tree. A certain root furnished a beautiful red dye, and they extracted many bright colors from the goods procured from the whites.<sup>33</sup>

The utensils of the red man were suited to his humble dwelling and homely manner of life, and were decidedly limited. When they had a pot everything was cooked and eaten from it; when they had none, the meat was roasted on a wooden spit over the fire or broiled on the coals. For the most part, a kettle, a wooden or stone bowl, a few horn or wooden spoons were the

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32. Douglas E. Branch, Hunting the Buffalo, ( New York )  
p. 29.  
33. Maximillian, op.cit., p. 104.

chief cooking articles, though kettles were scarce. It is doubtful if the Blackfeet ever made any pottery or baskets.<sup>33a</sup>

When the Indian first came into intercourse with the white man, his most eager desire was to secure knives, hatchets and kettles. He usually cooked his food by boiling it in a pot made of fresh hides, or in hollowed wooden receptacles which answered the purpose of kettles. Into these water was poured, and heated by hot stones which were constantly thrown in. When on the chase, and hungry, he ate his meat raw and bloody just as it was cut from the newly-slain animal.<sup>34</sup>

The Blackfeet utilized the horns of the bighorn and bison for making cups, dishes and spoons, softening them by cooking them in hot ashes, which process gave them various forms, and as they cooled they recovered their original hardness.<sup>35</sup>

Though the Blackfoot subsisted largely on the flesh of bison, which was systematically hunted, his diet was somewhat varied in summer at least. Large quantities of service berries as well as choke cherries, cane berries

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33a. Hodge, op.cit., pt. 2, p. 570.

34. Lee J. Munfreville, Twenty Years Among Hostile Indians, (New York, 1899) p. 79.

35. Chittenden & Richardson, op.cit., vol. 3, p. 1002.

and other wild fruits were picked and dried, and these pounded up were reduced to small quantities and used to flavor soup and to eat with pemmican. The wild turnip and wild carrot and some other roots from the vegetable kingdom were also used in season. The camas root, which grows in abundance east of the Rockies, was dug and dried. These bulbs were also roasted in pits, in which a hot fire had been built, the bottom of which was first lined with flat stones. When the stones were thoroughly heated, the coals and ashes were removed. The pit was then lined with grass and filled with camas bulbs. Over these, grass, twigs and earth were laid, on top of which a fire was built, and kept going for several days. The freshly-roasted camas is somewhat similar in flavor to the sweet potato.

Though tobacco was unknown among the Blackfeet until the coming of the white man, this tribe used several substitutes<sup>35a</sup> for the fragrant weed, the most common being kinnekinnick or a native tobacco which was carefully planted in the spring. On such occasions they always gave a beaver ceremony,<sup>35b</sup> for according to their legends tobacco was first given to the Indian by the beavers. For the crop they selected a lonely place near a stream

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35a. Catlin, op.cit., vol.1, p. 172.

35b. Walter McClintock, Old Indian Trails, (Boston, 1922) p. 44.



could not be obtained. This process was called "jerked" meat, and in preparing this dried <sup>36</sup> or jerked meat, the thickest parts of the animal were cut in large thin sheets, and hung in the sun to dry, where in a few days it dried so well that it could be packed in sacks and transported over long journeys without spoiling. If the weather was not clear, the meat was often hung on lines in the upper part of the lodge. Salt was never used in this process, as the meat if kept dry rarely putrefied.

The making of pemmican required a special process. The bison meat that was to be dried was cut in thin slices, wound <sup>n</sup> about sticks which slanted over a slow fire, or laid upon a rack of wickerwork. Sometimes the heat of the sun alone was enough for drying. These dried-out slices were then pounded into a flaky mass; over successive layers of these shreds an equal weight of fat which had been melted and was yet soft, was poured. Bison fat was said to be far more palatable food than is the fat of domestic beef, and any quantity, plainmen said, could be eaten without fear of indigestion; so that this layer loaf of meat and fat, packed in bags, was capable of being kept indefinitely, and acceptable, if not exciting, to the taste. Pemmican became the

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36. Chittenden & Richardson, op.cit., vol.4, p. 1376-77.

standard food of the fur traders as well as of the Plains Indians.

Buffalo robes -- the winter skin of the bison when his coat of hair was blackest, thick and handsome -- were dressed by the squaws to be acceptable in commerce. The fur trader never bought untanned robes; no white man could attain the exquisite workmanship of the Indians. The method of dressing the robes varied somewhat among the tribes. According to Catlin, the Crow Indians were probably the most expert in this work,<sup>36a</sup> and the process or method appears to have been similar. First they immersed the bison hide in a mixture of ashes and water for a few days. That loosened away the hair; next they pinned the skin taut to the ground, with stakes through the edges, and sharpened the skin with handfuls of the brains of the bison. This was followed by a smoking process which rendered the hide soft and pliant even after being wet many times.<sup>37</sup>

A white bison was a great rarity and was looked upon with great awe, and the skin of this particular animal was "fine medicine" and brought a handsome price.

In the spring the people had great feasts of the

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36a. Catlin, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 62.

37. Catlin, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 62.

eggs of ducks and other water-fowl in which this region abounded.

The Blackfeet, as stated above, subsisted entirely upon the chase. None of them ate any kind of water fowl, amphibious animal, or fish. Turtles and frogs were never eaten. Dogs, considered a great delicacy <sup>by the</sup> <sup>by the</sup> Cree, Sioux and Assiniboins, were never eaten by the Blackfeet. Neither were snakes, grasshoppers, worms or other insects eaten. Salt was an unknown condiment in the tribes at this time.

Brandy and whiskey were the greatest luxuries of these Indians, as of all Indians of North America. They were very fond of this liquid refreshment, and drank to excess whenever they were able to obtain it. According to Robinson, they considered these excessive good for them, saying the biliousness caused by their mode of <sup>life</sup> <sup>life</sup> <sup>life</sup>.

Several authors have called to notice, among them Marshallian, Irving and Orinwell, that the Blackfeet were livelier than other tribes, the latter being generally quarrelsome when in liquor, while the former showed their jollity by dancing, singing and hugging

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- 37a. Clark Wissler, The American Indians. (New York, 1917) p. 53.  
38. H. M. Robinson, The Great Fur Land. (New York, 1903) p. 193.



one another with all sorts of antics.

It is said that in the early day when the Indian demanded rum or whiskey, it was given to him of the finest quality, carefully diluted with water. The Blackfoot being fiercer than the Cree received a weaker cup or mug, as the standard of mixing in those days defined seven parts of water to one of rum for Blackfoot, and only three parts of water to one of rum for the Cree.

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30. Katherine Hughes, Father Jacobus, (New York, 1911)  
p. 60.

## Chapter IV

### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The superiority of the Blackfoot Nation to many other savage tribes is known in their tribal organization. The three tribes, Siksikas, Bloods, and Piegiens acknowledged a kinship with each other, and while distinct tribes or bands, still considered themselves a nation. This Confederated Nation considered themselves superior to the other tribes, and there is a certain justification in Blackfoot history for this belief. Once he too was a sulking hunter, trying to get within bow shot of the wary deer, or trudging weary miles on the trail of the migrating bison; for in that far distant time, he had only the dog to help him drag the family possessions from place to place. He had little cause, then, to look down upon his neighbors to the east and to the west. But with the acquisition of the horse from the Snake Indians about the middle of the eighteenth

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century, everything was stimulated for the Blackfeet, for they acquired many horses, and became swift and daring riders over the plains. It is quite probable that their spread south and westward to the Rocky Mountains was due largely to the attainment of the horse, and about the same time, of the gun.

Each of the Blackfoot tribes<sup>41</sup> was subdivided into a number of bands, of which Grinnell enumerated forty-five in all. It has been said that these bands were gentes formerly, and took their name from some peculiarity or habit they are supposed to possess. As the members of a gens were all considered relatives, there was a law prohibiting a man from marrying within his gens, but this law, like many of the ancient customs is no longer observed. In later years the gens often received outsiders, who were not related by blood to the gens, and such people could marry within the gens.<sup>42</sup> Ancestry no longer became necessary to membership.

Marriage customs among the Indians appear to have been fairly uniform all over the western plains even though they varied in detail. The women were married

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40. Thompson, op. cit., p. 334. "The first sight of horses by the Blackfeet was at the time of Blackfeet-Snake war, 1730."

41. Grinnell, op. cit., p. 208.

42. Ibid., p. 211.

young and ordinarily acquired by some form of purchase.<sup>42a</sup>  
Polygamy was not uncommon among them and according to  
David Thompson, who spent a winter among the Piepans in  
1787-88, the wife more frequently than the husband was  
the cause of it, as the care of the tent and the whole  
drudgery of the family devolved on the women. They had  
to gather the fuel, cook the provisions, dress the skins,  
and repair every article of dress, carry the baggage on  
the journey, and pitch the tent when they halted. In  
these and similar employments the lordly fathers and  
husbands as well as brothers thought it degrading to  
assist them, and unworthy of warriors to engage in  
such employment. Some of the chiefs had three to six  
wives.<sup>43</sup> Kootenah Appe by his five wives had twenty-  
two sons and four daughters. He was friendly to the  
whites, and in his speeches reminded his people of the  
great benefit the traders were to them;<sup>44</sup> that it  
was by their means they had so many useful articles,  
and guns for hunting and conquering their enemies.

As a rule, before a young man could marry, he was  
required to have made some successful expedition.<sup>45</sup>

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42a. Maximilian, op.cit., vol. 20, p. 110.

43. Thompson, op.cit., p. 347.

44. Ibid., p. 348.

45. Grinnell, op.cit., p. 211.

in this he was guided by a few traditional laws, one of which prohibited a youth to marry or have a lodge of his own until he had taken a scalp or performed some military exploit that would entitle him to act as a brave, and at the same time acquired a number of horses or other property, with which he was able to buy the woman of his choice. Neither was he allowed to sit in council; he could not take part in a feast, or enter a dance until he had shown his courage by killing an enemy or accomplishing some successful feat in the acquisition of horses.

The marriage ceremony <sup>4ba</sup> among the Blackfeet was very simple. It was usually arranged by the parents of the prospective bride, the father of whom often consulted his nearest kin as to the relative merits of the young man, and the purchase price was announced either by the father of the girl or by a friend. In the case of a chief's daughter, if the suitor had been accepted, the bride-elect made known the engagement in this wise: Three times daily during the time which intervenes between the proposal and the marriage, this shy Blackfoot maiden, accompanied by a younger sister, must carry to the lodge of her future husband, only the choicest bits of carefully prepared food and meats which

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4ba. James Willard Schultz, My Life As An Indian, (New York, 1907) p. 9.  
Griener, op.cit., p. 112.

the lodge supplied. Of course, the Indian girl was at this particular time the subject of many jocular remarks and much teasing by her friends. After the betrothal, the parents gave a feast to which only relatives of the groom were invited.

All was then excitement among the relatives of the bride-elect, and the hubbub was great as they proceeded to fit out her trousseau with the best that they could afford. A dress of antelope skin, snowy white, was ornamented with hundreds of elk teeth. Her deer-skin leggings were heavily embroidered and fringed with porcupine quills, and often adorned with beads and brass buttons. Her moccasins of deer-skin were decorated on the toe with a three-pronged figure, worked in porcupine quills or beads, the three prongs, it is said, representing the three tribes of the nation.

The summer wrap, (blanket) was of elk skin, beautifully tanned, free of hair, and the dew-claws intact. They also gave their daughter a suit of buckskin handsomely trimmed with ermine tails for her husband.

To her mother fell the work of making her a new cowskin lodge, no small service, complete with new lodge poles, lining, and eagle-like back-rests, which some one has named the Indian "Morris chair."

These things provided the marriage took place. But there was no wedding ceremony in the early day as the whites regarded it. For it was not until much missionary work had been done among the red men that marriage was finally raised to its present dignity. With the assistance of the bride's mother, the new lodge was set up in the center of the circle, the young couple took their place, and the domestic life began.

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The dower of the bride, which depended on the social position and wealth of her father, was usually in horses, the number of which must be doubled <sup>46a</sup> by the groom and sent to the lodge of his father-in-law. Often too, the father sent over to the young man his own war clothing and arms, war bonnet and war shirt, a fine shield, bows and arrows, -- his complete equipment. Thus was paraded the wealth of the chief that their social standing might be recognized by the tribe.

Poorer and less important people married more quietly, but all Indian marriages did not follow this form, and there were elopements and unconventional marriages as there are among the whites. However, there was among the Blackfeet an expression, "mat-ah-ah-i-tan-ap-i-ni-pa-as-ni-ai-o-sin," which when translated

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46. Mumfreville, op.cit. p. 90. "The price of an Indian maiden was from one to forty horses, the number depending on the wealth and order of the suitor."

46a. Grinnell, op.cit., p. 215.

reads, "not round (is) his piness without woman,"<sup>47</sup> which perhaps accounted in part for the arrangement of marriage by her parents for a girl who had reached marriageable age without having been used for as a wife, and also for the acceptance of white husbands for their daughters and sisters. Moreover, girls of the Blackfeet tribe were always guarded closely by their relatives. They never went out of the lodge after dark except with the mother or some older kin. Seldom did young men speak to young girls unless they were relatives.

A man might have any number of wives, but no woman was expected to have more than one husband.<sup>48</sup> Economic conditions appeared to have regulated this matter. A man who was poor could have but one, but a wealthy chief might have as many wives as he was able to support. The first woman a man married was called his "alta-beside-him" wife, and she was invested with authority over all the other wives. It is said that the first woman an Indian married and the last one were generally his favorites; the former because he had become accustomed to her ways, and it was she

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47. Schultz, op.cit., p. 39.

48. Edward Thomas Denig, Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri, in Bureau of American Ethnology, 40th Annual Report (1928-29) p. 504.



who managed and directed his lodge in all its domestic arrangements; the latter because she was young and handsome; and this fact was particularly gratifying to his masculine vanity, inasmuch as he was still able to attract the bellies of the lodge.

Divorce occurred in most cases only by the wish of the husband, but occasionally either party might take the initiative. If a man tired of his wife he sent her home without any ceremony. She took her property and retired; the children remained the property of the husband. The woman was then free to marry again if her parents were willing. Infidelity by the wife was frequently punished by the amputation of her nose by her husband, or by the members of his society.<sup>49</sup>

However, it appeared there was another and stronger reason for morality among women. In their rite, the Sun Dance, "only a pure woman could make a vow to the Sun for the recovery of any of her family who were ill and give the Sun Dance in their behalf. Besides it was a great honor for a woman to give the Sun Dance; she stood for what was best in Indian life; she had the respect and veneration of the entire tribe; none stood

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49. L.B. Halladine, Indian and White of the Northwest, (Baltimore, 1894) p. 171.

higher than she. Parents pointed to her as an example  
to their children."

Indians are usually represented as being a silent, sullen race, rarely speaking and never laughing or joking. So that as it may, this characteristic was refuted for the Blackfeet, at least, by many authors, among them being such authorities as Daniel Brinton, Colonel Richard Irving Dodge, George Bird Grinnell, James Willard Schultz, Walter McClintock and David Thompson. Daniel Brinton in his "Myths of the New World", tells us that the Blackfeet were more genial than the Iroquois, of milder manners and more vivid fancy, and attributed this difference to their preference for the open prairie and plains in contrast to the endless and sombre forests where were the homes of the Iroquois. Grinnell, Schultz and Colonel Dodge, all of whom spent considerable time among the Blackfeet tribes, represented the Indian at home as a gossipy, talkative person, fond of practical jokes, reciting and story-telling. Away from strangers and in his own camp, he was noisy, rollicking, and full of rough fun of any kind. Chatty and vivacious, their nights were spent in song and dance, and a permanent Indian camp was said to be the noisiest place in the world.

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50. McClintock, op.cit., p. 32.

51. Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World, (Philadelphia, 1895) p. 33.

Among the strongest traits of Indian character were curiosity, endurance and patience. He must know all the camp gossip and tattle, the meaning of every mark on the ground; nothing escaped the watchful eye of the Indian, for he had a craving to know all that was going on about him.

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As to endurance, Ross Cox in 1811 on the Columbia River where he spent a winter among the Indians, relates an incident of the cruel treatment meted out to a Blackfoot prisoner by the Salish. During the performance of these cruelties which are too revolting to recount, the wretched captive never winced, and instead of suing for mercy, he added fresh stimulus to their barbarous ingenuity by the most irritating reproaches. "My heart is strong. You do not know how to torture, etc." Public opinion among the Indians had made endurance the highest virtue, and he who could subject himself to the most excruciating torture without an expression of pain was the best man.

The government of the Blackfoot Nation was well adapted to their condition, and was in the hands of chiefs, being legislative, judicial and military. Each tribe was divided into a certain number of bands, with a band-chief, a war-chief, and a mine mine or

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SS. Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River, (New York, 1838) p. 119.

shaman. The chiefs as a general rule, were elective, though great respect was paid to hereditary chiefs; but they had little or no power unless they had distinguished themselves as warriors. The band-chief was responsible to other chiefs for the conduct of those under him, and controlled the war chief and minn misha or shaman. Formerly these thirty-three bands were responsible for all offenses against each other to the "Exkinoya" or great council of the tribes which formed a supreme council and decided all matters affecting the entire nation, and exercised all judiciary and legislative power. This exkinoya chief was the supreme chief for one year; the other band-chiefs formed the senate, while the other chiefs formed a representative body. Each band enjoyed its independence in local matters.

There is also a military and fraternal organization among the Blackfeet known as the "I-kour-ab-kah-tai" or "All Comrades" and contained according to Crinnell,<sup>53</sup> twelve orders of societies most of which are now extinct. These societies were really law and order associations. They were part of the old life, but

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53. Annual Report of Indian Affairs, 1874, John D. Wood, Agent, p. 398.

54. Crinnell, op. cit., p. 231.

lost their importance when the Blackfoot came to live about an agency.

Of these societies, in former times, the Braves or Soldiers Society was perhaps the most important. They were charged with the proclamation and enforcement of all laws enacted by the supreme council, the protection of the camp, all police matters, and the punishment of public offenders. Military discipline was at all times enforced by the military police, the great business of which had to do with gamblers, for all the Indians were given to this vice of gambling day and night when idle. Horse racing and betting was also very popular, and perhaps the most popular game was that of bands, (button, button).

The stakes were blason robes, clothing, tents, horses and arms. Yet according to David Thompson, there were a few things they never gambled, such as the tips, the <sup>56</sup> camp kettle, and the dogs and horses of the women.

With the Carlisle influence practically dominating the tribe, old customs and tribal laws have passed, and the control of the old chiefs have gone into the discard.

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55. Samuel S. Drake, Indians of North America, (New York, 1880), p. 738.

56. Thompson, op. cit., p. 361.

## Chapter V

### MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION OF THE BLACKFEET

As to the Indian religion, no two tribes had the same gods. The Great Medicine, the Great Manitou, was the particular power which helped the individual. Hence the effort to obtain the protection or assistance of some god, and the fearlessness of the Indian, like the Arab, who thought he had gained it.

With the Blackfeet their principal deity was the sun ←  
and a supernatural being known as Napi, <sup>b7</sup> "old man", the latter was a trickster, at times sympathizing with the people, and at others he played malicious tricks upon them. He was a combination of strength and weakness, wisdom and kindness, and good to those who did right. As a special means of obtaining his favor sacrifices must be made.

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b7. "Napi or Satos means any form of medicine or mystery."  
Maximilian Journal, p. 120, vol. II.

These were often presents of clothing, fine robes or furs, and in extreme cases when the prayer was for life, the offering of a finger.

Intensely religious, the Blackfeet made daily prayers ← to the Sun and to Mapi, and nothing of importance was undertaken without asking divine assistance. They were firm believers in dreams which they thought were sent by the Sun to inform them as to future happenings. As dreams started them on the war path, so too, a dream threatening bad luck would dissuade them from making any hostile demonstration. The tribes would not fight regardless of how favorable the situation if the "medicine" were bad, and could not be restrained if it were good.

The religious and ceremonial life of the Blackfeet was somewhat complex, parts of which were exceedingly picturesque. Many of them centered in dreams but more in the dances which were numerous. The most famous ← perhaps was the Sun Dance, a bloody ritual, a religious festival, undertaken for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the people and participated in only by men of the tribe usually in the month of June.

Closely associated with and as a preliminary to ← the Sun Dance was the Medicine Lodge. This was a sac-

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50. Dr. Harry Hurney-High, op.cit., p. 12.

rifice which was invariably offered by women. These ceremonies when understood were full of beauty. The raising ← of the lodge was done by medicine men and women who had fasted and meditated for many days in preparation for the sacred ceremony. The medicine lodge was the shrine erected each year upon which sacrifices to the Sun were laid. Since the Sun was their deity, to it was attributed the power to give life or to draw life back to itself. The red of all blood was in their belief the life-giving quality. The sun's appetite for color must be appeased; therefore colorful offerings were made.

After fasting, the medicine men and women started the ceremony of the raising of the medicine lodge. A great cottonwood was cut down and brought to camp where the tribe had gathered in tipis. These tipis were placed in a circle, the center of which was the site for the medicine lodge. When proper fasting had taken place, the medicine men and women went to the woods and procured a number of straight poles about eighteen feet long. These poles were peeled and fastened together at the top with rawhide thongs and while the savage cut the strings he counted "coups". As soon as the center posts and wall posts were up the whole structure was covered with brush.



In the meantime the sacred dried tongue of the bison had been prepared and placed in the Medicine Lodge by the Medicine Lodge woman and the ceremony of giving offerings took place. "Standing by the pile of tongues, she cuts up one, holds it to the sun, eats part of it, and gives a small piece to every man, woman, and child, who in turn prays to the Sun and Napi for long life." <sup>58a</sup> At the present time these offerings may consist of any bright colored articles, -- bead work, yards of colored calico, decorated clothing, etc. The ceremony of offerings, singing and praying being finished, the ceremony of the Sun Dance now followed.

In former days when the Blackfeet were free there was self-torture at the Sun Dance by various warriors who had made vows to the Sun in times of peril. "Slits were cut on both sides of the breast and sticks were inserted under the muscles. By means of ropes hanging from the center pole and fastened to these sticks the warriors danced before the people amidst the beating of drums and applause of the spectators until the sticks were torn loose from the flesh. Many of these warriors did not live long after the torture. It was believed they gave themselves to the Sun and the Sun

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58a. Grinnell, op. cit., p. 266.

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took them."

To the Blackfeet these rites were of the loftiest significance; the ceremony representing the highest and most reverential form of their wild savage nature and their religious zeal.

Be that as it may, the great nation of the Blackfeet, composed of the allied bands of Bloods, Pieguns and North Blackfeet was more difficult of spiritual conquest than the Salish, Nez Percés and Peas d'Oreilles. These braves of the north country had little reason to love the white men in the capacity of traders. Imprisoned, renegade hunters made raids upon them, and a feeling of hatred was fostered by such agents of the American Fur Company as Alexander Harvey and Francis A. Chardon, the former, one of the most noted and desperate characters which the fur trade produced. "Many were the desperate deeds committed by him and it required all the steadying authority of Culbertson<sup>59</sup> to offset his sinister influence among the Indians." One massacre of Blackfeet took place at Fort McKenzie in the winter of 1843-45, and aroused the hatred of the Indians to the highest pitch. They began a war of vengeance, raids and murders on all whites

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59. Walter McClintock, op. cit., p. 314.  
60. H. M. Chittenden, History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River (New York, 1903) 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 250.

found hunting and trapping in their territory. 61

It was little wonder then that the early missionary efforts were disheartening, and to a man possessed of less courage than Father De Smet the cause would perhaps have been abandoned. But Father De Smet was a man of unflinching fortitude, and having ministered to so many other Indians, his order ambition became the conversion of the Blackfoot Nation. Repeatedly we find him not only as spiritual advisor but as official mediator between the Government and a bewildered and imposed on people who, seeing their lands invaded, and treaties broken, were in many places in open revolt.

As early as 1841 Father De Smet had met some of these Indians on the Missouri and baptised one of the chiefs and all his family on Christmas day. <sup>62</sup> Little was done among them, however, until 1846-47 when Father De Smet with an Indian guide and an interpreter recrossed the Rockies and again entered Blackfoot territory. Arriving at Fort Lewis, a trading post of the American Fur Company located a few miles above Fort Benton, he spent some time in the instruction of the Piegans and accomplished that which seemed scarcely

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61. Chittenden, op. cit., p. 832.  
62. De Smet, Letters and Sketches, (Cleveland, 1900),  
Letter 12, p. 317. R. O. Townsend, ed., Early  
Western Travels.

less than a miracle, --- the peaceful meeting, at the confluence of the Judith and Missouri rivers, of the Blackfeet and the Salish who had been enemies from time immemorial.

Leaving Father Nicholas Point at the fort to carry out the work of christianizing the Indians, Father De Smet continued his journey eastward in the autumn of 1846.

An interesting account of Father Point and his work is found in the Journal of Lieutenant Bradley, who writes:

"Father De Smet, the celebrated Indian Missionary, arrived at the post about the last of August, 1846, on his way east accompanied by Father Point, S. J. Father Point, whom we have seen was left at the fort, was furnished quarters and a room for a chapel and school. He was a man of great austerity and severity in the practice of his religion. The Father was filled with zeal for the conversion of the Blackfeet to the holy faith, and gradually made himself feared and respected by every inmate<sup>63</sup> of the fort."

During the few months he was in their midst, Father Point, by his perseverance and example accomplished wonders. He visited the different bands and being a skillful artist won the good will of the chiefs by painting their portraits.

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63. Lieutenant Bradley Journal, Montana Historical Society Contribution (Helena, 1908), vol. 3, p. 246.

Having translated by the help of an interpreter the prayers into Blackfoot language, he taught them to the children and the adults "and all seemed eager to memorize and recite them in common."

Father Point at this time estimated the number of Blackfeet at about <sup>341</sup>10,000 souls, -- their number being about half of what they were before the decimation by small-pox. He further stated that the greatest obstacle in the way of their conversion to Christianity was polygamy to which the Indian tribes in general are addicted. But in spite of their shortcomings, Father Point while among them administered the sacrament of baptism to 667 Indians.<sup>64</sup> But notwithstanding they were all anxious to have Black Robes permanently established among them, and "every returning spring" wrote Father De Smet, "they sent pressing invitations to that effect," it was not until 1859 that a permanent mission was fully decided upon.<sup>65</sup>

The christianization of the Blackfeet/was definitely tied up with the founding of St. Peter's Mission, effort to establish which began as early as 1846. It had a thrilling story. The first site

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64. Palladino, op. cit., p. 174.

65. Ibid., p. 172.

on the banks of the Teton River close to where the town of Choteau stands today was chosen by Father A. Hoecken who had been assigned to the work.

This site, however, was not suitable, and another location was chosen the next year, 1860, on the banks of the Sun River, where a couple of log cabins were built. The danger of Indian attacks was so pressing, however, that the priests were ordered to withdraw, and operations were suspended.

During the summer of 1861, a third site was selected by Father Giorda and Father Imoda on the Marias River. This time, however, many of the Indian chiefs manifested a great dislike for the location, and expressed a wish that it might be located on the Missouri, near to the place where the Indians were then expecting to engage in agriculture. To comply with their wishes, the ever patient priests, Father Giorda and Father Menetrey, the latter who on June 20, 1863 at the Sun River government farm performed the marriage ceremony of the notorious Henry Plummer, chief of the road agents, and Miss Elsie Bryan, selected in 1862 a desirable place near Fort Shaw, a short distance above the mouth of the Sun River.

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66. E. S. J., Laveille, The Life of Father De Smet (New York, 1915) p. 311.

In the year 1865 there occurred one of the most severe winters ever experienced in Montana. The hard winter had been preceded and was followed by a very dry summer which destroyed for three years in succession all crops of the Missouri and its vicinity. The Blackfeet became distressed and this led to the removal of the Mission once more, -- this time to its final site, at the foot of the Bird Tail divide.

The rapid settling up of that part of Montana by the whites had induced the Government to restrict the territory of the Blackfeet tribes, and these Indians were placed on a reservation some sixty miles from the Mission. <sup>66b</sup> The reservation had also been confined to the minority of Protestants with resulting disharmony on both sides. (See grant of 1888).

Over ninety percent of the Indians are Catholics, due, no doubt, to the great work done by the early missionaries, Jesuits like Father De Smet, Father Point, Father Imoda and Father Ravalli, who followed these restless wanderers from place to place, and shared one after the other, all the hardships of Indian nomadic life.

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<sup>66a</sup>. Palladini, op. cit., p. 160.  
<sup>66b</sup>. Kessler, Indian Reserves (Washington, 1904, 2 vols.) Vol. II.

## Chapter VI

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BEAVER

For two reasons the Blackfoot Indians were of great importance in the development of the fur trade. Their territory was the richest beaver country in the west<sup>67</sup> and they were the most consistently hostile of any of the Indian tribes. Every portion of their territory was marked by struggle and many of the early trappers fell a victim to their savage fury.

The Blackfoot had many legends and traditions concerning the beaver. Many of these legends connect the beaver in some way with the creation of the world. The medicine bundle, known as the "Beaver Bundle", was

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67. Harrison C. Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations, 1822-23, (1918, Cleveland) p. 237. "Smith moved his company to the Musselshell and the Judith. Beaver was plentiful, but danger imminent." George, Catlin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 59. "The country abounds in beaver and buffalo."



supposed to have supernatural attributes, and the individual possessing one of the precious bundles was believed to be possessed of special powers due to its ownership. These bundles were considered of great value and the beaver skin had some symbolical significance apart from its ordinary use.<sup>68</sup>

"Missi picoutan amiseou", said an Indian chief to a missionary. "The beaver does everything perfectly well. It makes kettles, hatchets, swords, knives, and in short it makes everything."

In some of the Jesuit accounts mention was made of presents of beaver skins being made to different tribes when adjusting disputes between them. The value of the skin was not great, but the sentiment conveyed by them meant much and served to bind the treaty.

"The flesh of the beaver is fat and savory."<sup>69</sup>  
The feet are deemed the most savory parts. The tail<sup>69a</sup> affords a substitute for butter. The skin is sold for nine or ten dollars worth of provisions or merchandise, the value of which does not amount

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68. George Grinnell, op. cit.

69. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 1394.

69a. Maximilian, op. cit., vol. 23, p. 153. "At a Blackfoot feast, boiled Beaver tail with prairie turnips was set before us . . . and is reckoned a good dish even in the United States."

to a single silver dollar. A gill of whiskey which does not cost the trader more than three or four cents is sometimes sold for three or four dollars."

As beaver fur was the great staple of the fur trade at this time and widely sought because of its commercial value, both the trappers as well as the Indians became expert in the best methods of taking him. Chittenden<sup>70</sup> tells us that the universal mode of taking the beaver was with the steel trap. "The trap is a strong one, and was valued in the fur trade period at twelve or sixteen dollars. These traps were baited with castor or musk which is supplied by the animal itself, the odor of which has a great attraction for the beaver. Usually the beaver was skinned near the place of its capture and only the skin, the tail and castoreum were taken to camp. On the average it required about eighty skins to make a pack of one hundred pounds, the value of which was from three to five hundred dollars in the mountains. The great value of such property caused it to be guarded with much solicitude, for a single Indian could carry away, unaided, the rich

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70. Hiram Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 380. Maximilian, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 380. "Iron traps were advanced the Indian for this purpose."

produce of a year's hard labor."

From the time the traders and trappers began to penetrate these distant regions it was their ambition to open up trade relations with the fierce and refractory Indian tribes, but the incessant hostility of the Blackfeet in particular placed a serious check on the extension of trapping beyond Three Forks, and this restricted the upper Missouri companies to an area already worked for some time. The Blackfeet also controlled directly or indirectly for a considerable time the only two passes over the mountains; consequently every band of trappers or traders that crossed the Cordilleras risked attack <sup>71</sup> from these savage marauders.

Of these various companies which operated from St. Louis to the west, three are prominent, -- the Missouri Fur Company. (Mammel, Lisa and Chouteau), the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, <sup>72</sup> (William Henry Ashley), and the American Fur Company. In 1807 Lisa established a post at the mouth of the Big Horn in the territory of <sup>72a</sup> the Gros Ventre where the country was rich in beaver, but because of the hostilities of this allied tribe of

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71. Harrison C. Dale, op. cit., p. 56.

72. Eliza Chittenden, op. cit., p. 176, Ch. 8, Vol. 1.

72a. John Work, *Journal of*, (Cleveland, 1925), ed. by Lewis & Phillips, p. 31-37.

the Blackfeet, his post was soon abandoned according to the account of Dale in "The Ashley-Smith Explorations". In the following spring another post was erected in the heart of the Blackfeet country at Three Forks. But the vicinity of the Three Forks was dangerous country for any white man and this post likewise was abandoned<sup>73</sup> because of the implacable Blackfeet. Another attempt was made by this same company in 1822-23, at a new post at the mouth of the Big Horn, where many beaver pack were collected, but the post met with a fate similar to the former. Most of the men were<sup>74</sup> killed and all the furs and equipment stolen.

Indeed the whole history of the Missouri Fur Company had been one of conflict with the Blackfeet, culminating finally in the great disaster of 1823 which practically ended operations of the Missouri Fur Company in the Northwest.

In spite of the disastrous failures of the Missouri Fur Company, Gen. William H. Ashley, the promoter of the Rocky Mountain Fur company, laid plans to establish trade relations with the Blackfeet in 1828. Instead of depending on the Indians to fur-

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73. Miran Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 223.

74. John Work, Journal of, op. cit., p. 25.

nish their furs, Ashley determined to employ white trappers in the work of trapping, and for the regular established post to substitute the annual rendezvous.<sup>75</sup> The rendezvous was conducted at appointed points to which the annual supply of goods could be conveyed from the states and from which the year's accumulation of peltries could be transported down country. The trapper was to supplant the trader. He might procure a considerable portion of his furs from the Indians or by shrewd bargaining from the employees of other companies, but he was to secure all that he could by whatever means; he was paid in proportion to the number and quality of the furs he bought to the rendezvous.<sup>76</sup> However, Ashley had already built two posts, one at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and another near the mouth of the Big Horn. It was his plan to build two more, one at the mouth of the Marias, and another at the Three Forks. But Ashley, like all his predecessors, failed to open trade relations with the Blackfeet.<sup>77</sup> This reason together with the fact

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75. Harrison C. Dale, op. cit., p. 67.

76. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 273. "As a consequence of this new method it became necessary to appoint some place of meeting where the various parties could assemble each year with their peltries. Hence arose the well-known 'rendezvous' of the mountains, one of the most interesting features of the fur trade."

77. Chittenden, op. cit.

that the Missouri Fur Company was better equipped to withstand the American Fur Company in competition toward the head waters of the Missouri caused Ashley to push overland and carry his operations to the base of the Rockies, which they crossed by the South Pass, the first such crossing recorded,<sup>78</sup> and discovered by Thomas Fitzpatrick in 1823. Beyond the mountains in the rich valley of the Green River, the Ashley Company found beaver streams which were to yield the manager of the company a fortune in the next four years. Accompanying this expedition were such men as Jedidiah Smith who has given much information in regard to western geography; also the Sublett brothers, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and the famous trapper and scout, James Bridger.<sup>79</sup>

At this time, in 1820, the American Fur Company, under the efficient management of Kenneth McKenzie, had established a post at Fort Union in the center of a great game region, and to which came many tribes of Indians invited in by messengers sent out by McKenzie. The next year this able manager determined to extend the trade up the Missouri for the Blackfeet and up the Yellowstone for the Crows, both territories

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78. John Work, Journal of, p. 37.

79. Arthur D. Smith, 1820 Jacob Astor (Philadelphia, 1929) p. 222.

being rich in beaver. Hitherto the country of the Blackfeet had not been successfully occupied by any company, the Missouri Company having been twice driven out with great loss, while Ashley and Henry had met with a similar experience. The Blackfeet appear to have been under the influence of the British traders, so far as they were under any influence from without, and this was hostile to the Americans.<sup>80</sup>

It so happened in the fall of 1830, that a wandering trapper who had served with the Hudson Bay Company at the post on the Saskatchewan frequented by the Blackfeet, appeared at Fort Union. This trapper, Berger, by name, understood the Blackfoot language and knew many of the Blackfeet personally. Here was the individual who could accomplish for McKenzie his desire, -- the acquisition of the Blackfoot trade. This would be a dangerous expedition, but Berger accompanied by twelve men, and displaying the Stars and Stripes, set out for the Blackfoot encampment<sup>81</sup> hardly expecting to return. The "forlorn hope" as they were called, after a perilous journey of many hundred miles along the Missouri to the mouth of the Marias reached the village of the Blackfeet. Recognizing a former friend in

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80. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 330.

81. Charles Larpenteur, ~~Early Years on the Upper~~  
Missouri, (New York, 1893) 2 vols. vol. 1, p. 112.

Berger, they were received in a friendly manner. After feasting for some time, Berger made known his intentions. A council was held among the Blackfeet chiefs with the result that a delegation agreed to accompany Berger to Fort Union, which was reached after a long and arduous journey. There the conference with McKenzie<sup>82</sup> resulted in the signing of a treaty the following year, 1831, followed immediately by the erection of Fort Piegan at the mouth of the Marias for the American Fur Company by Capt. James Kipp. This was the most advanced post in the habitat of the Blackfeet. The treaty was consummated on the 30th day of November, 1831.<sup>83</sup> In a letter purported to be written to Chouteau by McKenzie from Fort Union, December 11, 1831, mentioned by Chittenden,<sup>84</sup> is found the following. "I have lately negotiated a treaty of peace between the Assiniboine and Blackfeet Indians, which I expect will be ratified. Exchanges of tobacco have been made and all requisite ceremonies observed. If firm and durable it will be of great importance to this district. The Piegans seemed from the start to be warmly attached to the Americans. It is a fortunate circumstance, for they

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82. Charles Larpenteur, op. cit., vol. 1., p. 113.

83. Hiram Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 332.

84. Ibid., p. 333-334.



84a  
are the beaver hunters of their nation. They were very jealous of their rights -- would not permit white men to set a trap in their country."

A little later the field of the upper Missouri was as fully occupied as it ever came to be by the American Fur Company. There were three primary bases of operation: Fort Union at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone; Fort Piegan (McKenzie) near the mouth of the Marias; and Fort Cass near the mouth of the Big Horn. These various establishments erected in the space of five years had firmly established the American Fur Company in a region which had frustrated the efforts of all traders to establish trade relations with the Blackfeet as well as with other tribes, and was ample proof of McKenzie's extraordinary executive ability.

Among the schemes which McKenzie originated for the promotion of business was the introduction of the steamboat in the trade. Before 1830, little steamboat business was done either above or below the mouth of the Kansas river, and McKenzie's plan of taking a steamboat to the mouth of the Yellowstone was thought to be a hazardous enterprise by the business men of

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84a. Maximilian, op. cit., vol. 23, p. 182. "The Piegans catch the most beaver. The Siksikai and the Blood Indians catch but few beavers, being chiefly engaged in war parties, and especially selling man to the Hudson's Bay Company."

St. Louis,

However, the plan was outlined by P. Chouteau in a letter to the home office of the company in New York with the result that in 1831 the steamer "Yellowstone" with Capt. B. Young as master left St. Louis on the "16th day of April, 1831, and ascended the upper Missouri, arriving at Fort Tauxemah June 16th, 1831.

The next year the boat reached Fort Union about June 17, 1832." <sup>86</sup>

This noted voyage completed a step in reaching the head of navigation on the Missouri by steam and the third step was completed when the boat plied between Fort Union and Fort Benton in 1834. But from 1836 onward, the Missouri steamboat was an indispensable feature of frontier life until the coming of the railroad surpassed it in usefulness.

It is needless to say that the coming of the steamer made a profound impression upon the Indians; it aroused a feeling of terror and also increased the respect for the Americans. They referred to the steamer as the "Fire Boat that walks on the waters."

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85. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 340-341.  
86. George Catlin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 15. "Month of Yellowstone, Upper Missouri, 1832. I arrived at this place yesterday in the steamer 'Yellowstone,' a distance of two thousand miles, the greater part of which has never been navigated by steam. To Mr. Chouteau, a proprietor of the boat, I am indebted for my passage."

To the Indian the steamboat was a friend and a foe, for it brought the early traders with their welcome merchandise, the glass beads, the red calico, the tobacco, the knives, the precious tea, the rifle that took the place of the bow and arrow, and also, the liquor and the smallpox.

Trade was carried on in two ways: Men from the post with a cargo of liquor and trinkets would go to an Indian camp, and there make their bargains; or the Indians would come to the fort and transfer their furs to the company. Trading was a matter of exchanging 'fire-water', a few trinkets, and scanty provisions, for the furs of the Indians.

The tremendous profit made by the company in these transactions may be seen in an example of a trade as listed by Larpentour.<sup>87</sup> Out of the 210 robes which he obtained at this time, 180 were secured for five gallons of alcohol; the other 30 were obtained for 'goods', some flimsy cloth, and some trinkets as beads, hawk-bells, red paint, and hand looking-glasses. The percent of profit according to Coues must have been several thousand, "as five-sixth or more of the poisonous liquor the Indians drank was water

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87. Charles Larpentour, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 195.

for which that portion of robes was exchanged."

Each summer the returns were taken to St. Louis, and in 1838 Larpentour enumerated the amount taken down: "Eight Mackinaw boats, each containing 250 pieces of bison robes besides many small furs."

These profits for the Fur Company were further augmented by statistics compiled by an Indian Agent<sup>80</sup> for the expenses and receipts of the fur trade on the Missouri and its tributary waters during the fifteen years between 1813-30. The total amount received from the sale of beaver, otter, coon, deer, and muskrat skins amounted to \$5,750,000, of which the sum of \$1,500,000 represented the returns on beaver skins. The profits of the trade, then, were \$1,000,000 for fifteen years, or \$66,666 annually. This figure however, does not begin to represent Astor's profit from the Missouri basin. They were simply the immediate profits earned by the individual traders on the furs they forwarded to St. Louis. Astor furnished them with trade goods at a fixed advance upon cost of 15 per cent as allowance for transportation and immediate profit to himself, but that is another story.

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<sup>80</sup>Larpentour, op.cit., p. 100.

<sup>81</sup>Senate Document No. 90, 32nd Congress, 1st. Sess.

To attempt to give figures of the extent and value of all this fur trade would be impossible, as only a small part of the figures are obtainable, but the totals would be enormous.

Whiskey was considered an indispensable article for trading with the Blackfeet, and alcoholic liquor which until the government interfered in 1834, was the chief article of barter not only with the Indians but with the free-trader as well who, while himself depreciating its evil effects, was compelled by the ruthless methods of rivals to enter into the whiskey business. Of course he charged scandalous prices for the beverage, as noted above, and watered it copiously, but in spite of all this the Blackfeet craved it and would have it at any sacrifice.

It is said that the larger companies made almost unceasing efforts to smuggle whiskey up the river in their steamers, and many stories are told of the whiskey running trips of some of these boats in their efforts to dodge the government inspectors who were stationed at Leavenworth and Bellevue.

One story is related by Larpenteur that came very near wrecking the career of one of the big companies. To Fort Union one night in the fall

of 1833 came Nathaniel J. Wyeth, who devoted his life in the vain attempt to develop the Columbia river salmon fisheries. He stopped for a few days at the Fort where he was hospitably entertained by the factor, who explained to him the operations of the fur company as well as those of the whiskey still. Wyeth it is said appeared to be delighted with the fine establishment, but became disgruntled at what he considered the exorbitant charges when he came to settle his account. He said nothing, however, but upon reaching civilization again he reported the existence of the still which was used to make whiskey from the corn obtained from the Indians below.

The extensive use of beaver fur in the early years of the nineteenth century led to an immense exportation from America to Europe, and this great demand led to the rapid extermination of the beaver, reaching as high as 200,000 skins annually. Also in a letter written by Mr. Astor the previous summer while in London to Messrs. Bernard Pratt and Company, St. Louis, Missouri, 1834, we note the beginning of the downfall of the beaver trade. "I very much fear beaver will not sell well very soon unless very fine. It appears that they make hats of silk

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in place of beaver." The fur trade saw its best days before the middle of the thirties. As one author says: "After 1834 it was no longer profitable to trap beaver because of the falling price." From that time onward the fur trade appears to have declined in importance so far as the beaver was concerned. This was doubtless a fortunate occurrence for the preservation of this little animal, for the beaver like the buffalo would have become extinct.

The coinage of the United States is adorned by the image of the Indian, the bison, the eagle, but the beaver that for many years was the medium of exchange has not been so honored. The beaver which made American millionaires, enriched Europe, and made the new world possible to pioneer has no permanent place on American coinage.

## Chapter VII

### THE SCOURGE OF THE CHALLOFOX

The year of 1837-38 was long remembered by the Blackfeet for the small pox plague <sup>91a</sup> ravaged the west and north and caused the death of thousands of the Indians. As a matter of fact, the tribe was again decimated <sup>91b</sup> by this dread disease in 1837-38, and again in the year of 1869. In 1864, they were reduced by measles.

According to the account given by Larpenteur, the plague was brought into the country by the steamer St. Peter on the 24th of June, 1837. The plague ran well into the year 1838. It seems it

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91a. Larpenteur, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 132.

91b. Hodge, op. cit., pt. 2, p. 571.



had made its appearance about the time the boat reached Fort Pierre on the upward journey, but in passing the Mandan village, an Indian stole a blanket from one of the sufferers. Here it spread with unparalleled fury among the Indians along the Missouri and was carried from tribe to tribe until it reached the Blackfeet.

Great care was taken at Fort Union to dispatch the annual outfit for Fort McKenzie without carrying the smallpox; the expedition was in charge of Alexander Harvey who took every precaution, but in spite of his efforts the disease broke out in his party. Arriving at the mouth of the Judith, Harvey sent word to Culbertson who had charge of Fort McKenzie. Culbertson decided to leave the cargo at the mouth of the Judith till the disease had run its course. However, there were large numbers of the Piegans encamped near the Fort awaiting the arrival of the boat. When they learned of the proposed delay they became suspicious and insisted that the boat should be brought up. Culbertson expostulated with them but was obliged to yield to their demands.

The result was as had been feared. The disease was communicated to the inmates of the post as well as to the Blackfeet. For upwards of two months not

an Indian was seen and Culbertson, fearing the dreadful truth, went in search of them. At Three Forks where the Piegiens spent their autumn hunting beaver, they came upon a village of 60 lodges, only to find it deserted, with dead bodies strewn in every direction. The small-pox had done its work well, and the few survivors of the village had fled in scattered groups among the mountains. The mortality among the Bloods and Blackfeet had been as great as among the Piegiens, and Culbertson estimated the total loss among the three <sup>92</sup> bands at six thousand souls.

When the epidemic first made its appearance among them, the Blackfeet tried to combat it. Their first effort to cure it was through the conjury of the medicine man. Finding this of no avail they resorted to other treatment. When the patients complained of fever they were taken from the lodges and rolled in the snow, which meant almost instant death. Another remedy was the steam bath, after which they were thrown into the river, this treatment being equally as fatal as the former. They also tried other remedies, but without effect. As the disease spread rapidly, attacking a great many, they finally gave up in despair,

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92. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 229.

declaring that the anger of the Great Spirit had been visited upon them and threatened to annihilate them. Those who survived were disfigured by great pits in their faces and bodies; being excessively proud of their personal appearance, they were so humiliated at sight of these scars that some of them committed suicide. As suicide<sup>92a</sup> was almost unknown among the North American Indians, one may gather from this alone idea of the distress of the Blackfeet over their disfigured appearance.

The effect upon the tribes was various. It was said that the whites at Fort Union had difficulty in reserving themselves from the wrath of some of the Indian tribes for placing the scourge at their door, as they believed. But according to Maximilian, the Blackfeet on the other hand were completely humbled and looked upon it as a "judgment from Heaven for attempting to injure their friends, the whites."

The sweat lodge<sup>92b</sup> referred to was regarded as

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92a. Maximilian, op.cit. p. 529. "Among the Blackfeet a person who commits suicide is regarded as the most heinous criminal, and never arrives at the Olympian field."

92b. Colonel C. S. Shields, Glenset Indians of the Northwest. (New York, 1931) p. 84. "The sweat bath lasts for an hour or more. The sweat lodge is built to represent the Sun's own lodge or home, that is, the world."

only as a curative agent, but as a religious ceremony as well, and was considered very beneficial in illness of all kinds. This structure was built in the shape of a hemisphere, three or four feet high, and six or eight feet in diameter. The frame was usually of willow and was covered with cow skins and robes. Inside was a hole in the ground for hot stones. Several persons entered at a time, water was spouted on the stones and they also kept their hair wet. While the steam was rising from the stones the bathers chanted and prayed to the Sun, Moon, and Morning Star. After an hour they came out and plunged immediately into the river.

Medical care was also furnished by their physicians or medicine men. Their first prescriptions were roots and herbs of which they were said to have a great variety of species; and when these had failed, their last resort was to "medicine or mystery." "For this purpose the medicine man has an unaccountable dress in which he always arrays himself, dances over the patient, shaking his frightful rattles, and sings songs of incantations in hopes to cure him by a charm." <sup>98c</sup> The theory of most diseases was that an evil spirit had entered into the body of the sufferer and that a cure could only be effected by its expulsion.

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98c. Catlin, op.cit., vol. 1, p 48.

The Indians have some efficacious remedies derived from the vegetable kingdom: a white root from the Rocky Mountains, called by the Canadians, rhubarb, which is said to resemble our rhubarb in its effect and taste and likewise acts as an emetic.

Then there was the "Blacksnake" or Sharp Vine, which the Blackfoot believed to be an excellent remedy for breaks and sprains. The roots were grated and placed in boiling water. The inflammation was reduced by holding the injured member in the rising steam.

Sage or Old Man (*Kakamela*) was boiled and used as a drink for mountain fever. Sage was generally tied to articles that were sacrificed to the Sun.

Red Dane-Berry (*Aotaea arguta*) which grew along streams and near the mountains, was boiled and used for coughs and colds.

Infectious diseases were beyond the power of the Indian doctor. Surgery was so primitive that when the arm or leg was broken there was no assurance that it could be used in the future.

## Chapter VIII

### THE BISON OR BUFFALO

No conception of the Blackfeet would be complete without the buffalo or bison. Indeed his shaggy, awkward bulk served as a picturesque companion for the Indian in all sketches of the plains as shown by Catlin, Bodmer, and later artists. Not only for the Blackfeet, but for the other tribes of the plains as well, the bison was the source of things material and spiritual. About this great shaggy beast clustered the Indian legends, his almost countless numbers, his continuous migrations; Blackfeet ceremonies were based upon the yearly hunt which occupied all of the tribes for most of the summer, for of all the animals the bison was considered most sacred by the Blackfeet.

Originally the bison ranged from the Alleghanies

to the Rocky Mountains, and from Great Slave Lake southward<sup>95</sup> to central Mexico. From the Original Journals of Lewis and Clark one may find the note of Lewis written at the Great Falls Portage: "Some hunters were sent out to kill buffalo. The Indians inform us we should shortly leave the buffalo country after passing the falls."<sup>96</sup> The foot of the Rocky Mountains was approximately the limit of the buffalo range.

There appears to be no satisfactory evidence that the bison ranged extensively on the coast or beyond or within the Rocky Mountains. By 1800 the bison was practically exterminated east of the Mississippi River, and by the middle of the century the bison were restricted to the great plains where they continued to roam by millions until about 1869, when the completion of the Union Pacific railway divided them into a northern and a southern herd and initiated the beginning of the end of the buffalo.<sup>97</sup>

This remarkable animal furnished nearly everything that the Blackfeet wanted, and in the life of the trapper as well, it was a principal resource. Almost every part of its huge body was utilized. Their food, their ornaments, their clothing, their tipis their toys, were

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94. Original Journals of Lewis & Clark, New York, 1904)  
Ed. by Reuben Gold Thwaites, 7 vols. vol. 8, p. 288.  
95. L. Ferriand, op. cit., p. 62.

made from the bison hide. Indeed the bison was almost indispensable in supplying the wants of the Blackfeet. ( See chapter III on various uses of bison skins.)

The dress of the head chief of the Blackfeet whom Catlin painted was surmounted with the robe of a young bison bull; and on the smooth side, handsomely fringed and ornamented with porcupine quills, the battles of his life were recounted in picture. His headdress was an ermine base for a pair of buffalo horns polished to a fine glaze. This headdress of curving horns was an honor for the chief alone.

The chase or bison hunt was the grand event, and second only in importance to that of a war expedition. It was the test of horsemanship, of archery, of fine gun-craft, and often the opportunity for glory on the war path as well, for in the favorite haunts of the bison there too were found the tribal enemies also seeking the means of subsistence, and an encounter meant battle

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95. Original Journals of Lewis & Clark, op.cit., vol. 5, p. 189. "The Hellgate (East Fork) receives its name from the canon which Lewis describes as 'a narrow confined pass' stretching east from Missoula to the entrance of Big Blackfoot River (Cockalahishit). As this was the route by which the Indian trappers and traders had to pass on their way to the buffalo country, and haunted by war parties of Blackfeet, it acquired in the picturesque French, the title "Fort de l'Infer."



97

to the death.

When the season came for laying up a supply of food, as when the bison drew near, great preparations were made both for the sport of hunting and for the care of the meat. These were seasons of activity and excitement as well as of hard work, and the subsequent comfort of the village depended upon how well the work was done. Furthermore, the gathering of robes was the Blackfoot's source of revenue, and he must lay in a supply of robes for trade for the time when he would go to the company's posts, or their traders would come to reside with him.

The methods of capture were various. In the earlier days when horses and guns were scarce, wholesale destruction of the bison was commonly resorted to by

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96a. Alexander Ross in "Hunters of the Far North" states: "We reached a defile in the ridge called Hall's Gate, a distance from Flathead Fort about seventy miles. This place is rendered notorious as being the great war-road by which the Piegan and Blackfeet visit this side of the mountains; by the same pass the Flatheads and other tribes cross to the Missouri side in quest of buffalo. This spot has been the scene of many a bloody contest between these hostile nations." Ross was in this locality in 1832.

97. Douglas E. Branch, op. cit., p. 37. "By 1820 the Cree Indians had despoiled the Sturgeon River region of buffalo by driving the herds over a bluff, and had moved down into the buffalo range of the Blackfeet, who became their implacable enemies."

98. Original Journals of Lewis and Clark, op. cit., vol. 2 p. 93. "On the Missouri just above the entrance of the Judith we passed the remains of a vast many mangled carcasses of Buffalo which had been driven over a precipice of 120 feet by the Indians and perished."

alluring vast herds at full gallop to the brink of a precipice or into the mouth of an artificial enclosure. The force of the mass behind crowded those in advance ahead until they fell upon each other at the foot of the cliff or enclosure, and were thus slaughtered by the hundreds.

This required a great deal of skill and favoring of the wind, for the bison unlike domestic cattle, ran against the wind, and it is said could scent a hunter at a mile's distance.<sup>99</sup> This method was likewise exceedingly dangerous and unless the 'decoy' was a fleet runner he was apt to be crushed to death or trampled under foot.

With the advent of the horse and the gun, hunting the bison on horseback facilitated matters, and as all Blackfeet but the very poorest owned at least one horse, hunting the bison was much easier than in the old days, and medicine men lost their prestige because their services were no longer necessary to bring the bison.

For bison running, a sure-footed and fleet horse was required. Both ponies and hunters were trained in the ultimate perfection of skill, and it is said that the favoured bison horse served no other purpose than to carry his master in the chase. The bison cow, which

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99. Original Journals of Lewis and Clark, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 93. Here Lewis gives an excellent description of bison hunting.

made much better beef than the bull, when pursued by the hunter ran rapidly, <sup>100</sup> and unless the horse was fleet, it required a long and exhausting chase to overtake her.

The bison had immense powers of endurance and would run for many miles without any apparent effort or diminution in speed.

On the morning of the bison hunt the braves rode out to the chase. "A pipe bearer preceded them, and the dog soldiers walk beside the mounted hunters. Once in sight of the herd the braves give kindly advice to their horses -- not to fear the bison, to run well, and not to be gored. The pipe bearer blows puffs of smoke toward the sun, the four winds, the earth and the buffalo." Then the chief gave the word, and two lines of hunters passed at full speed toward the right and left of the herd. In this chase the hunter must be quick in placing his arrows and sure in his horsemanship for notable success. A miscalculation frequently meant death under the heels of the frightened animals. Since arrows were scarce and hard to save they were recovered at the end of the hunt, and it was considered very unfortunate if an arrow only wounded a bison, for then the arrow could not be recovered.

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100. Captain H. C. Leroy, The Prairie Traveler, (London 1865) p. 164.

A fleet well-trained horse ran without guidance from his rider, abreast with the bison, turned as the bison turned, and did not slacken his speed until the bowstring tanged. Then at the sway of the rider, he was off at full gallop again beside another bison. This chase continued until many hundreds of the animals were killed or the game had passed beyond further pursuit.<sup>101</sup>

The bison was a difficult animal to kill. Wounds upon his shaggy head or neck were not effective. It was only in the region of the heart that the blow was sure, and the Indian and the white hunter sought out this region in all their attacks. The animal was not ordinarily dangerous, and only when starting from its wounds would it turn upon its enemy. At such times its rage made it a formidable adversary and lucky was the hunter who could keep out of its way.

As soon as the chase was over, the lucky hunter made an incision on his bison and helped himself to a raw repast. The liver of a fat bison was esteemed beyond all other morsels; also the tongue, roasted or boiled, and the roasted marrow-bones were considered great delicacies.

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101. Mrs. Frances F. Victor, River of the West, (Newark, 1876) p. 246. An account of a buffalo hunt was given to Mrs. Victor by the famous frontiersman, Joe Meek, in which he stated that while on a hunt in 1837, with a thousand Menominee, he saw from two to three thousand buffaloes killed in half an hour.

When someone, either by order of the chief or of his own volition presented his kill to the "Medicine" for a feast. At once there was great revelry and joy, and dancing and eating of marrow-bones to celebrate the aftermath of the royal sport.

The work of the women began in earnest now, for the animals were left where they fell, and to the women and children was left the work of perparing the meat for their own consumption, the hides for their numerous uses among the tribe, as well as the dressing of robes for the trade. The fur trader never bought untanned robes; no white man could attain the exquisite workmanship of the Indian woman in the rather intricate method of robe dressing. (See chapter IV for process of meat curing and robe dressing.)

#### Extermination of the Bison

As early as 1819 there had been a demand for bison robes, but in the golden era of the fur trade the demand for beaver exceeded that of all other furs until well into the thirties when the manufacture of the silk hat, the falling price of that particular fur, and the near extermination of that animal caused the fur trade to continue its toll on the bison herds.

By 1800 the bison had entirely disappeared east

of the Mississippi, and by 1807 had already receded as far as to the 93th meridian. It was a common saying during the era of the fur trade that the bison was retreating before the white man at the rate of ten miles a year.

The multitude of these animals, even in later years, was from all obtainable evidence literally immeasurable. Many attempts have been made to estimate the probable number from the size of particular herds, from the quantity of bones collected since his extermination, and from other data, but these attempts never succeeded with any degree of precision. They numbered millions and millions. <sup>101a</sup> It was a well known fact that rail-

road trains had been stopped to let the herds pass over the track, while the delay of steamboats on the Missouri from a similar cause was by no means a rare occurrence. Colonel Dodge relates that in 1871, he made a trip along the Arkansas River of 36 miles. "At least twenty-five miles of that journey was through one immense herd, a solid mass." Capt. Lee Humphries in his "Twenty Years Among the Hostile Indians" states, "I am inclined to give full credit

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101a. Ernest Ineson-Thompson, Life Histories of North-  
ern Animals, (New York, 1909) p. 260. "Estimated  
their greatest number from fifty to sixty millions."

to the stories of their enormous number. I cannot remember any statement that exaggerated the number of these huge beasts that roamed over the western country in the early part of my experience there. The plains were literally black with them." The innumerable trails worn by these animals may still be seen in many places, silent proof of the vastness<sup>102</sup> of the multitude that used them.

Marvelous, however, as were the numbers of the bison, their complete disappearance from the earth was more marvelous still. The disappearance of the bison was caused largely by the "advance of civilization<sup>103</sup> with all its elements of destructiveness; the secondary cause of extermination being man's greed and wanton destructiveness; absence of protective measures on the part of the national government; the preference on the part of hunters, both whites and Indians, for the robe and flesh of the cow rather than that of the bull; the perfection of the modern breech-loading rifles."

Until the building of the transcontinental railroad made it possible to market the "buffalo product"

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102. Branch, op. cit., p. 120. "Innumerable trails had been traced, many of them nearly a foot in the soil."

103. William T. Hornaday, The Extermination of the American Bison, Smithsonian Annual Report, 1887, National Museum, p. 326.

bison hunting as a business was almost wholly in the hands of the Indians. Hornaday tells us that "even then the slaughter so far exceeded the natural increase that the ultimate extinction of the species was predicted. 104

Even without railroads the extermination of the race would have been delayed perhaps about twenty years. With a reckless disregard for the future, the Indians with one accord singled out the cows 104a for slaughter because their robes and flesh were preferred by the redskins."

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104. Catlin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 239 states: "In May, 1832, at Fort Union, a party of five or six hundred Sioux on horseback forded the river about midday, and spending a few hours among a herd of buffalo, procured the river at sun-down and came into the fort with fourteen hundred fresh buffalo tongues, a few which they received a few gallons of whiskey."

104a. Chittenden, op. cit., p. 817, "Some of the causes that contributed to the rapid disappearance of the buffalo are noted by Dr. F. V. Hayden who visited the Upper Missouri country several times between 1850 and 1860. 'As near as I could ascertain, about 250,000 individuals are destroyed every year, about 100,000 being killed for robes. At the present time the number of males to females seems to be at the ratio of ten to one, and this fact is readily accounted for from the fact that the males are seldom killed when the cows can be obtained. Skins of females only are used for robes, and are preferred for food. Besides the robes that are traded to the whites by the Indians, each man, woman and child require from one to three robes a year for clothing. A large number is employed in the manufacture of lodges, and an immense number of animals, which it would be difficult to estimate, are annually destroyed by wolves and by accidents.'



The completion of the Union Pacific Railway in 1869 divided the bison of the United States into two great herds, known thereafter as the northern and the southern herds.

Although the range of the northern herd covered about twice as much territory as did the southern, the latter probably contained twice as many bison. The number of the southern herd Hornaday estimated in 1871 at about three millions, though other estimates place this total much higher than that. As this thesis is not concerned with the southern herd, suffice it to state that the southern herd was practically exterminated by 1875, the total slaughter in the three years, 1872-74, amounting to 3,153,730; the settlers and Indians in the same period killing approximately 540,000.<sup>103</sup>

#### Destruction of the Northern Herd

After the slaughter of the southern herds during the seventies, thousands of buffalo-hunters and skinners came, some of them from as far as Texas, to the upper Missouri and the Yellowstone. These professional hunters made a serious business of killing the bison for robes and hides. The Indians are said to have discontinued the slaughter

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103. Hornaday, op. cit., p. 501.

of the bison as soon as the lust and pleasure of the chase had disappeared. Until the whites made bison-hunting a profession the great herds of the upper Missouri and the Yellowstone seemingly remained intact.<sup>106</sup>

In 1869, the northern grazing grounds of bison extended from the Platte river valley northward to the southern shore of Great Slave Lake, eastward almost to Minnesota, and westward to an elevation of about 8000 feet in the Rocky Mountains. The herds were most numerous along the central portion of this region, and from the Platte valley to Great Slave Lake the range was continuous. Hornaday estimates that in 1870 "there were about one and a half million buffalo north of the Platte in the northern herd."<sup>107</sup>

Speaking of the country held by the great Blackfeet tribes, General Isaac I. Stevens, governor of the old Washington territory, wrote in 1864 that these tribes "lived almost exclusively on the buffalo." He estimated that the Blackfeet numbered about 10,000 souls. They secured some 20,000 buffalo robes annually for trade and used about the same number to repair their lodges.<sup>108</sup> Stevens considered that a total of 150,000 bison above the age of three years were killed by the Blackfeet yearly. To keep up the supply he thought there must

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<sup>106</sup> Trexler, "Buffalo Range of the Northwest" (1920) in Mississippi Historical Review, p. 360.

<sup>107</sup> Hornaday, op.cit., p. 604.

<sup>108</sup> Hazard Stevens, The Life of Stevens, (New York, 1901) p.105.

be about a million and a half bison in the Blackfoot country.

The beginning of the final slaughter of the northern herds dates from about 1880, by which time the annual robe crop of the Indians had diminished about three-fourths, and also summer killing for business hides began on a large scale.

Up to this time the Blackfoot and other Indian tribes as well, particularly the Sioux, Crows and Cheyennes, found their most profitable business and greatest pleasure in hunting bison. It required approximately from eight to twelve buffalo hides to make a covering for a tipi and sometimes a single large tipi required from twenty to twenty-five hides.

Indians of our Northwest territory marketed about seventy-five thousand robes every year as long as the herds were sufficiently large to afford the supply. <sup>109</sup> It is estimated by Hornaday that for every skin sold to white traders four were used in supplying the wants of the Indian. Based on this the total number of bison slaughtered annually by these tribes must have been about three-hundred-seventy-five thousand.

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109. Hornaday, op. cit., p. 1066

In a letter written by I. O. Baker of Fort Benton, Montana, of the Baker firm, dated October 6, 1887, one  
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may learn of the amount of the shipment of buffalo robes.

"There were sent east from the year 1870 from this point  
111  
about seventy-five thousand buffalo robes. In 1880 it  
had fallen to about twenty-thousand; in 1883 not more  
than five-thousand, and in 1884 none whatever. The  
collection of hides which exterminated the buffalo  
was from the Yellowstone country. Up to the year 1880,  
so long as buffalo were killed only for robes, the  
bands did not decrease very materially; but beginning  
with that year, when they were killed for their hides  
as well, a most unadiscriminating slaughter commenced,  
112  
and from that time on they disappeared very rapidly. "  
The great triangle bounded by the three rivers, Missouri,  
Mississippi and Yellowstone, was a favorite place, and  
it was estimated contained two-hundred-fifty thousand

and bison. Another favorite locality lay between the

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110. Trexler, op. cit., p. 359.

111. Branch, op. cit., p. 204. "From 1874 to 1877 there  
were annually shipped from Fort Benton eighty-thousand  
to one-hundred-thousand robes. I. O. Baker and T. C.  
Pewer controlled the bulk of the robe trade at that  
time."

112. Hornaday, op. cit., p. 506. In Smithsonian Report  
of 1887, part 2, states his report and date were  
obtained from traders and railway officials who agree  
that the herds were exterminated between 1880 and 1884.

Powder River and the Little Missouri. To this region went scores of outfits and hundreds of hunters and skinners.

"The hunting season that began in October, 1882, and ended in February, 1883, finished the annihilation of the great northern herd and left but a small band of stragglers numbering a few thousand.<sup>113</sup>

The building of the Northern Pacific across Montana also hastened the end that was fast approaching; but it was only an incident in the annihilation of the northern herd, as also was the work of Colonel Cody, who in eighteen months supplied the construction crew of the Kansas Pacific with four-thousand two hundred and eighty bison without half trying.<sup>114</sup>

According to Hornaday, "the American Indian is as much responsible for the extermination of the northern herd of bison as the American citizen. I have yet to learn of an instance wherein an Indian refrained from excessive slaughter of game through motives of economy, or care for the future, or prejudice against wastefulness. From all accounts the quantity of game to be killed by an Indian has always been limited by two conditions only—lack of energy to kill more, or lack of more game to be

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113. Hornaday, *op. cit.*, p. 505.

114. Frank Winch, The Thrilling Lives of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill (New York, 1911) p. 71.

killed. An Indian kills enough to supply his wants and exerts himself no further. This has given rise to the statement that the Indian killed only enough buffalo to supply his wants. If an Indian even showed any disposition to conserve the resources of nature in any<sup>way</sup> and restrain wastefulness, it would be gratifying to know of it." <sup>115</sup>

(The great heaps of buffalo bones that puzzled early explorers were the result of wanton slaughter as mentioned <sup>116</sup> by Lewis and Clark and later writers as well).

Regarding the former value of the bison to man, it is impossible to estimate closely the commercial value of the beef and hides during the period of active slaughter, but it has been estimated from fifteen to twenty million dollars. However, the real value of the bison was not to the white man but to the Indian tribes of the great plains. Besides the flesh--fresh, dried and made into pemmican--there were the hides which yielded tipi, clothing, bedding, and shields; the sinews which gave

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115. Hornaday, op. cit., p. 506.

116. Ibid. In 1886 Professor Hornaday of the National Museum organized an expedition for the purpose of securing a few specimens of the bison for that institution. Two attempts were made by this expedition in the vicinity of Miles City, Montana. After a long and hard chase twenty-five specimens were secured which are now in the National Museum. Hornaday gives many figures on robe shipment, his data being obtained from traders and railway officials. They agree that the great northwestern herds were exterminated between 1880 and 1884.

thread, rope and bow-string; the bones and horns which were fashioned into implements of various kinds.

The pre-eminent part which the bison played in the nutrition and industrial life of the Blackfeet accounted, too, for their relatively slight development of agriculture. <sup>117</sup> With the arrival of the horse, which was probably acquired by the plains tribes the middle of the eighteenth century, the successful pursuit of the bison was greatly aided; and this gave the final touch to their mode of life.

As a matter of fact, the bison was also a great political factor among the various tribes; nearly all the bitter warfare between nation and nation was for the sole purpose of maintaining or gaining the right to hunt in favorable fields. Thus the Judith Basin and the region of the Musselshell, favorite haunts of the herds, became also battlefields

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117. W. J. McGee, "The Horse and the Buffalo" in Bureau of American Ethnology, 15th Annual Report. p. 173.

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between the tribes.

"The buffalo created a common sign language for the tribes of the plains," said Seymour, "who met upon a hunt, when for their own good it was expedient to refrain temporarily from warfare." It was a language of signs and gestures; with its aid the Blackfeet, who became more proficient in its use than other tribes because of their extensive wanderings, could talk to the Salish, to Sioux, to Crow, to Mandan.

The ruthless destruction of the bison was a death blow to the Blackfeet. In the winter of 1883-84, some  
113a  
six hundred of the Piegiens in Montana died of sheer starvation in consequence of the sudden extinction of the buffalo coincident with a reduction of rations. Nothing could have more effectively broken the links of the Past for the Blackfoot Nation. The bison had been their living subsistence. Emerging each

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113. Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia, states:

"The Blackfeet lay claim to all that part of the country immediately at the foot of the mountains, which is most frequented by buffalo; and allege that the Flatheads, by resorting thither to hunt, are intruders whom they are bound to oppose on all occasions. The Flatheads, on the contrary, assert that their forefathers had always exercised the right of hunting, and that the right should not be relinquished."

113a. Fred Hodge, *op. cit.*, pt. 2, p. 571.

See also Annual Report of Comm. of Indian Affairs, for year 1883, p. 59, 60.



spring from the earth, as they once believed, the Blackfeet looked upon the bison as a manifestation of the Great Spirit's care for his people.

They did not stop to reason why or to what extent their reckless slaughter was accountable. They preferred to blame the extermination of the bison upon the Sioux and the American trader with his repeating rifle.

With the passing of the bison the proud and haughty Blackfeet went also, for with their meat supply cut off they were forced to give up their roving habits and become reservation Indians, and their place was taken by miners, stock raisers and prosaic farmers of another race. Ranches now flourish in the river valleys once dotted with the herds of bison and the skin tipis of the red men; cities now occupy the sites of the old trading posts; the trapper as a class has disappeared, and the northwest of the Indian, the mighty region ruled and held by the Blackfeet, is only a memory.

Behind the squaw's light birch canoe,  
The steamer rocks and raves;  
And city lots are staked for sale  
Above old Indian graves.

I hear the tread of pioneers  
Of nations yet to be - -  
The first low wash of waves where soon  
Shall roll a human sea.

The rudiments of Empire here  
Are plastic yet and warm;  
The chaos of a mighty world  
Is sounding into form.

-- Whittier

## Chapter IX

### HORSES OF THE BLACKFEET

According to the account of David Thompson,<sup>118b</sup> one finds the date of 1730 as the time of the Blackfeet-Snake war, at which time the Blackfeet obtained their first horses. It appears that this date must be correct, for in 1754 when these same Indians were visited by Mandry from York Factory, the Blackfeet had many horses, and their neighbors, the Assiniboins, had a few. Horses had been abundant in America in post-Tertiary times, but like the mammoth and the mastodon, had become extinct, and it was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that

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118b. Thompson, op. cit., p. 334. Thompson gives an account of the use of horses by the Snake Indians west of the Rocky Mountains, and of the first sight of one of these animals by the Blackfeet, and the clear inference that the Blackfeet obtained their first horses from the Snake Indians, and not from the Indians to the south and east of the Mountains. Thompson spent the winter of 1787-88 with the Piegiens on the south side of the Bow river.

they were reintroduced on this continent by the Spaniards.

"Our enemies, the Snake Indians, and their allies had  
<sup>119</sup>  
Misetutin (Big Dogs, that is, Horses) on which they rode,  
swift as the deer. We had no idea of horses and could not  
make out what they were."

As early as 1792 Alexander MacKenzie mentions the  
<sup>120</sup>  
horses of the Blackfeet. "The Piceanous, Black-Foot,  
and Blood Indians are the people who deal in horses and  
take them upon the war parties toward Mexico."

"The Blackfeet tradition goes back to the time when  
<sup>121</sup>  
they had no horses and hunted their game on foot; but  
as early as McKenzie's time, before 1800, they already  
had many horses taken from tribes farther to the south,  
and later they became noted for their great horse herds."

J. L. Spahn in his "The Last Hero of the Yakimas"  
states that the first horses came to eastern Washington  
about 1780, and that a little later the hills and plains  
of the Yakima were covered with Indian horses. The name  
given by them to the horse was "cayuse", the name being  
associated with the Indian tribe of that name then  
residing in eastern Washington.

In the report of the Expedition of Lewis and Clark,

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119. Thompson, op. cit., p. 330.

120. MacKenzie, op. cit., vol. 1, p. xviii.

121. Hodge, op. cit., pt. 2, p. 570.

1803, regarding the horse, we find: <sup>122</sup> "The horse is confined principally to the nations inhabiting the great plains of the Columbia, extending from lat. 40° to 50° N., and occupying the tract of territory lying between the Rocky mountains and a (Cascade) range of mountains which passes the Columbia river about the Great Falls; that is from long. 116° to 121° W. (This is the country between the Bitter-root ranges and the Cascade range.) The Shoshonees, Cheyppunish, Sokulke, Escheloote, Kneeshures, all enjoy the benefits of that docile, noble animal; the first three tribes possess immense numbers. Horses are said to be found wild in many parts of this extensive country."

In the early days of the eighteenth century, the Blackfeet were in possession of horses of the Spanish <sup>123</sup> stock which were numerous on the plains. When they secured horses and also guns about the same time, they took courage and began to venture out on the open plains to chase the buffalo and to go to war.

At first there were few horses among the Blackfeet, but they knew that their neighbors to the west and south-across the mountains and on the great plains beyond the Yellowstone, and to the southwest-had plenty of them; that the Shoshonees, the Snakes, the Cayuses, and Kallispels were well provided.

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122. *The History of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (New York, 1892) Ed. by Elliott Coues, 4 vols., vol. 3, p. 332.

123. Franchère, op. cit., p. 269.

Moreover, horses were looked upon in a measure as public property<sup>124</sup> that is, those nations who had few thought they had a right to take them from those who had many. Consequently when the Blackfeet began to realize what a change these animals would work in their mode of life, they conceived the idea of accumulating property, and it was not long before the idea of capturing horses from the tribal enemies was soon put into practice.

Soon there began a systematic plan of sending out war parties for the purpose of capturing horses. This continued for many years and was only abandoned after the settlement of the country by the whites which made it impossible for the Blackfeet longer to pass back and forth through the country on their raiding expeditions. Horse-taking at once became almost an established industry among them and conferred on the thief honor second only to touching the enemy.<sup>124a</sup> Success brought wealth and fame, and there was great excitement about the war journey. War parties of Blackfeet were constantly out, except in the coldest weather, in search of the much-valued horse.

In the very early days of the century, these war-

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124. Edward Thomas Dangle, op. cit., p. 470.  
124a. Maximilian, op. cit., p. 112. "Horse stealing is an eminent art among them, and a dexterous horse stealer is a person of distinction."

parties started out in the spring going to the land where horses were abundant. Sometimes they were gone a couple of years. It is said that on such journeys they used to go to "Spalya", which means Spanish lands. That they did get as far as Mexico was indicated by the fact that they brought back branded horses; <sup>125</sup> for in those days animals bearing brands were found only in the Spanish American settlements. <sup>125a</sup>

Journeys as far as Salt Lake were not uncommon, and Hugh Monroe has told of a war party he accompanied which went as far.

Indeed the horse was almost on a par with the buffalo as far as the value of the two were concerned, for horses could be exchanged for everything that was worth having; no one had as many as he needed. It was the horse stolen from their enemies that gave them wealth to purchase any arrows they pleased, and the father-in-law was anxious to have a son-in-law who could at any time replace his loss in horses. A fine war-bonnet, a strong bow, the much-coveted rifle of the white man, all these and many other things he could obtain if he had a horse to trade. Last and not least, the Blackfoot (for he is particularly addicted to gambling) could bet his horse on the popular

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<sup>125</sup>. Fremont, op. cit., p. 150.  
<sup>125a</sup>. Ordway, op. cit., p. 250.

races or the game of "hands".

The horse insured the food supply, made long journeys possible with the minimum of effort, facilitated the frequent moving of the camp, and supplied an ever-ready mount for the Indian, for whoever saw an Indian man who was not lazy?

The horses of the Blackfeet were generally of a superior breed to those found among other Northern tribes and commanded higher prices.<sup>126</sup> The braves were very fond of their horses and were very careful of them, differing in this respect from the Crees and Assiniboina who were rough and unmerciful masters. They had a custom of marking their ponies with certain hieroglyphics, painting them over with curious devices and scenting them with aromatic herbs.<sup>126a</sup>

<sup>127</sup>  
For a bridle they used only a long rope, made of buffalo hair, fastened to the lower jaw, with which it was tied. The saddle consisted of two broad flat boards, inclining towards each other at an angle, which lay along the side of the horse's back; it had before and behind an upright piece, which frequently had a leather fringe hanging to it. It was covered with skin, and had another

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126. Robinson, op.cit., p. 203.

126a. Maximilian, op.cit., vol. 23, p. 125.

127. Ibid., p. 107.



under it, and these skins served the rider at night for a bed. The Blackfeet were fond of a handsome housing, made of a large panther's skin which generally was obtained from the Rocky Mountains. The panther's skin was so laid across the horse that the long tail hung down on one side, and had scarlet cloth laid under it, which formed all round a broad border, as well at the fore legs as at the head and tail.

In the numerous movings of the Blackfeet, the horse was attached to a "traveille",<sup>127a</sup> an Indian contrivance consisting of two poles fastened together at an acute angle, with crossbars between. The point of the angle rested upon the back of the horse, the diverging ends of the poles dragged along the ground, and the baggage was tied on the crossbar. Over this improvised cart which was used by all the Plains Indians, rugged women with trains of lively children kept watch, and it frequently happened that the women as well as the carts were heavily laden.

The wealth of the Blackfeet was chiefly in horses of which they possessed a great number and which were accumulated in various ways.<sup>128</sup> Some of these wealthy Indians secured

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- 127a. Report of Secy. of Interior, 33rd Cong., 2nd Sess. Senate Doc. No. 1. (Report of Isaac Stevens) p. 408. Gives a detailed report on the use of the horse and the mode of transportation.
128. John Mullan, Military Road Report, (Washington, 1863), p. 50. "They are rich in horses. They are great horse thieves."

128

their fortunes by organized war parties for stealing horses as heretofore mentioned; others by gambling, for the Indian was ever ready to bet everything he possessed on the result of a horse race, and many a herd had been doubled through the winning of a contest of this sort. Many wild horses were also lassoed by the Indian.

Also with the coming of the whites, the Indians found an opportunity for trading horses, especially when the heavy immigration set in. The stock which the immigrants drove often became footsore, and the Indians picked up many good bargains in this way. They were shrewd traders, these Blackfeet, and he was a fortunate immigrant who got the better of them in a horse trade.

130

"The children of the Blackfeet are taught to ride from the time they are two years old, and by the time an Indian boy is ten he is as much at home on a horse as a white boy is on the ground. As he grows he becomes a fearless rider and almost forgets how to walk. The women ride as well as the

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129. Washington Irving, The Adventures of Capt. Bonneville, (New York, 1883) p. 80. "The young braves go to war to gain horses, and to acquire the means of setting up a lodge."
130. Col. G. O. Shields, op. cit., p. 21.

men." (See chapter VIII for training of horses.)

Among the Blackfeet the dead were clothed according  
to their station in life,<sup>131</sup> believing that they went to  
the 'Sand Hills' in their burial clothes. Dressed in  
gaudy apparel, they were sometimes placed within a tent  
in a sitting posture, or occasionally folded in skins  
and laid on high scaffolds out of the reach of wild  
beasts, under which the relatives wept and wailed. Often  
the things a person valued most were left beside the  
grave or buried with them.<sup>131a</sup> Frequently the best horses  
of a chief were killed<sup>131b</sup> to be used in the long  
journey to the spirit land. Parents who lost a son  
led his saddle horse through the camp and made public  
lamentations. Cutting off the manes of their saddle  
horses was also a sign of mourning.<sup>132</sup>

The horse was the consummation of all good to the  
Blackfeet: they moved on horseback, hunted on horseback,  
fought on horseback, and played on horseback. It is  
probably that their spread over the plains was due

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131. H. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 193.

131a. Maximilian, *Travels*, op. cit., vol. 23, p. 121:  
"At funerals of celebrated chiefs, twelve or fifteen  
horses are sometimes killed."

131b. Ibid., p. 83. "On the death of Saehkomapoh (the  
child) a rich and distinguished chief who is said to  
have possessed between 4000 and 5000 horses, 150 were  
killed with arrows."

132. Walter McClintock, op. cit., p. 275.

largely to the acquisition of the horse. As one writer has put it, the horse "stimulated" everything, and compares the change that took place to the "motorization of our own civilization in the last quarter of a century."

The importance of the horse in this period can hardly be over estimated. It was the cayuse of the Indian horse pack-train that furnished the means of transportation in the settlement of the west. Without the horse the development of the west would have been delayed. But the cayuse, like the Blackfoot, has seen its day.

## Chapter I

### DOGS AS BEASTS OF BURDEN AMONG THE BLACKFEET

Scarcely less in importance to the Blackfeet than the horse was the dog, a long slender, medium size, wolf-like animal, whose general appearance denoted its relationship to the wolf. The dog was an inseparable feature of Indian life.

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"The dog appears in Paleolithic Europe in close association with the remains of man and was practically universal in aboriginal America. The history of its development and dispersion over the earth would in a large measure be the history of man's cultural achievements."

History indicates that in the New World dogs served

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133. Clark Wissler, The American Indian (New York, 1917) p. 33.

at least four purposes: transportation, hunting, guarding and companionship, or food, according to locality.

The most striking characteristic of dog transportation was its limited distribution,<sup>124</sup> for its use was confined to the caribou and bison area.

"Dog packing in particular is a concomitant of those hunting tribes following a regular migratory circle. The bison-hunting expeditions of the Plains were in the early days facilitated by pack trains of dogs."<sup>125a</sup>

According to tradition, the prehistoric Blackfoot travelled on foot, assisted by dogs in the transportation of their effects before they obtained horses. We may imagine that in those days the journeys made were short, the camp travelling but a few miles. If canoes were ever used, the fact has been lost to tradition. Neither do they appear to have made use of the bull-boat then in use by some of the tribes on the Missouri. "When a deep stream was to be crossed with camp equipment, the skin covers of the tipi were folded into large

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124. Wislizer, op. cit., p. 35.

125a. Report of Sec. of Interior, 33rd Cong. and Sen.,

Senate Doc. No. 1. (Report of Stevens) p. 409.

"Dogs are used in transporting their effects in the same manner as the horse . . . dragging about 40 pounds."

dish-shaped bundles supported by cross pieces of wood, forming a kind of raft, upon which children, old people and baggage were placed and ferried across. These rafts were towed by the able-bodied men and women, usually the latter, swimming out and holding the lines with their teeth."<sup>124b</sup>

In moving the camp in ancient days the heaviest, bulkiest things to be transported were the lodges. These were sometimes very large, often consisting of twenty or thirty cow skins. The skins of the large lodges were sewn together in strips; when the lodges were set up these strips were sewed together. The dogs carried the provisions, tools and utensils, and sometimes, the lodge strips if these were small enough; for since the dogs were of medium size they could not carry more than 30 or 40 pounds,<sup>125</sup> depending on the size of the dog. Dogs also hauled the travels, on which were bundles and sometimes babies.

The dogs were harnessed in a number of ways. Among the Blackfeet the dogs were driven singly and were har-

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- 124b. Clark Wissler, Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians, (New York, 1910) in Anthropological Papers of American Museum of Natural History, vol. 5, pt. 1, p. 87.  
125. M. Glover Allen, Dom of the American Aborigines, Cambridge, 1920) in Bulletin of Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard College, vol. LXIII, No. 9, p. 453, 451, 517.

nessed to the travois by means of long traces. A round collar passing over the head and ears and fitting closely to the shoulders, fastened on each side of the traces, which were supported by a back-band of buckskin. The vehicle to which the dogs were harnessed was similar to that drawn by the horse. Two poles about fifteen feet long were fastened upon the dog's shoulders, in the same manner as the lodge poles were attached to the horse, leaving the larger ends to drag upon the ground behind him. Upon these poles was tied the bundle or pack which he was to carry and he trotted off amid the throng of dogs and women dragging his load.

The Blackfoot were inordinately fond of dogs and every family had several. This meant a whole herd of them for an Indian village, and when a stranger appeared there was a chorus of barks, howls and yelps.

Though the Blackfoot made a chum of his dog, allowing him to sleep in the tipi, and under the blanket in very cold weather, he starved him unmercifully even when they had plenty of food for themselves, and at times the dogs were reduced to eating grass. As a consequence the dogs were great thieves, and meat or food of any kind within their reach was not safe from the canine ravage.



Dogs were used as food, but not everywhere. In North America dog flesh was eaten in parts of the bison area, chiefly among the Siouan tribes,<sup>136</sup> Many tribes, however, were as averse to its use as were the whites.<sup>137</sup> The Blackfeet were of the latter class,<sup>137</sup> and the general tendency north of Mexico was to regard the dog as not proper food.

In ancient times, it is said that the things an Indian valued most were left beside the grave. The favorite dog<sup>138</sup> or the horses of a chief were killed at the grave in order that they might go with him to the Spirit Land.

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136. Wissler, op.cit., p. 41.

137. Grinnell, op.cit., p. 194. "Dogs, considered a great delicacy by the Crees, Gros ventres, and other surrounding tribes, were never eaten by the Blackfeet. I once heard a Piegan say, 'that it is wrong to eat dogs. Our dogs are always true. They mourn when we are absent, and are always glad when we return. They keep watch for us in the night when we sleep.'"

138. Ibid., p. 194.

## Chapter XI

### THE BLACKFEET IN WAR

The Blackfeet were a warlike people. Thompson tells us in his Narrative that in 1730 the time of the Blackfoot-Snake war, at about which period the Blackfeet obtained their first horses, and a little later their first guns, probably from York Factory, that they drove out the Kootenahas who lived east of the Rocky Mountains around the Belly River, the Salish who occupied the southeast portion of Vancouver Island and in British Columbia, and the Shoshones and their tribes.

Prior to that time the Blackfeet had no guns and their implements of warfare were rib-pointed arrowheads and shields. But with the advent of the gun supplied by

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139. David Thompson, op. cit., p. 383. Thompson bases this information on the tales of an Indian Chief of the Piegan, "Asukampee", with whom he spent a winter in 1787.

the traders, they became bold and daring warriors and successfully drove out the tribes who had been less fortunate than themselves in securing firearms.

At the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804-06, the Blackfeet then held the immense territory stretching almost from the Saskatchewan River, Canada, to the southern head waters of the Missouri River in Montana, and from longitude 106° to the Rocky Mountains. This rapid advance may be attributed to their being armed with guns and iron weapons, and thus by right of conquest, they came to claim all that territory lying north of the Missouri and east of the Rocky Mountains to the 105th meridian, and the 49th parallel.

Toward the early traders the Blackfeet tribes were very friendly. These traders came from the Hudson Bay Company, establishing small river camps to which the Indians traveled, carrying their furs and meat and securing weapons, blankets and trinkets in exchange. Thus equipped the Blackfeet were at a decided advantage over their tribal enemies, the Salish, the Crows, the Snakes, Nez Percés and any other tribes who infringed upon their conquered territory.

While the Blackfeet were never regularly at war with the United States, their general attitude toward the Americans in the early day, according to Hodge, was one of hostility, while maintaining a doubtful friendship with the Hudson Bay Company.

As to the warlike attitude of this particular tribe, some authors state there is a reason which accounts for<sup>140</sup> their bitter hostilities toward the whites. Whether this tradition is authentic or otherwise, the first permanent post was not established on Blackfoot territory till 1832 by Kenneth McKenzie at Fort Piegan on the Marias.

Amont the Blackfeet Indians a warrior's reputation rested upon the number of "coups" which stood to his credit in the records of the tribe. A "coup" was a deed of special prowess, and the particular acts which enabled a man to count "coup" were definitely laid down and recognized. The most usual acts which carried this privilege were killing and scalping an enemy, rescuing a wounded fellow, and stealing a horse from the enemy's camp.

The origin of a war party among the Blackfeet often arose from a dream. Upon awakening the Indian told of<sup>141</sup> "his dream", and if the young men believed that his medicine was strong and that he would have good luck, they decided to follow him.

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140. Rufus Sage, Rocky Mountain Life, (Dayton, Ohio) p. 283. "When the Blackfeet first saw the effects of firearms they were so much impressed that they wanted to know where they could procure some powder. They were told that it was a kind of grain, which, if sowed in the spring, like any other grain, would multiply in the harvest. They procured a large quantity at great cost and made the experiment. Nothing could induce them afterward to treat the white man as a friend."

141. Grinnell, op.cit., p. 250.

Before setting out on the war path, the warriors came together and sang the "wolf song". The ceremony of the sweat lodge was performed and the medicine-pipe man prayed to the Sun that good luck might attend them. On these trips their food usually consisted of pemmican. They always carried their war-bonnets and otter-skin medicine. These war parties sometimes lasted a year or more, it being considered disgraceful to return without scalps.<sup>142</sup>

The cause of this perseverance may be traced to their fundamental laws, one of which prohibited a youth to marry or have a lodge of his own until he had taken a scalp or performed some military exploit that would entitle him to act as a brave. Neither could he sit in a council or be present at a feast, nor was he allowed to join in a war or scalp-dance. The Blackfeet acquired their position or prestige in the tribe through their conduct in war.<sup>143</sup>

Upon the return from a successful raid, dances and ceremonies of celebration were held, and it is said often developed into the wildest orgies. The chiefs encouraged these celebrations of victory as it stimulated the young men to go out and fight for tribal glory and plunder.

Women and children of hostile tribes were often captured and adopted by Blackfeet tribes with all the rights and privileges of indigenous members. Men were

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142. Samuel G. Drake, *Indians of North America*, (New York, 1880) p. 736.

143. Thompson, *op.cit.*, p. 347.

rarely captured. When they were taken they were sometimes killed in cold blood, especially if they had made a desperate resistance before being captured. Sometimes a man would be kept for a time, but he always had a hard time at first. He was always watched, and when first brought into camp, the women and children "counted coup" <sup>144</sup> on him and pounded him with sticks and clubs.

It was evident then that the incentives to war among the Blackfeet were defence, revenge and desire for spoils. Disputes regarding the indefinite territory between the recognized tribal limits were also a prominent cause of hostilities, the Blackfoot violently resenting any encroachment upon what he regarded as his own territory. Offensive campaigns were sometimes undertaken as preventive measures to anticipated attacks and to inspire fear. In this manner they insured freedom from outside interference. The universal law of the savage demanded revenge for every death. The young men had no choice. He was compelled to be a warrior.

Although David Thompson spent a winter of harmony among the Flatheads in 1797, he later found them hostile when they learned of the construction of Kootenai House in 1807 on the head waters of the Columbia where they

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144. Grinnell, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

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thought he would distribute guns to their enemies.

In 1823 the Piegans destroyed a party of the Missouri  
146 Fur Company, killing the leaders, Jones and Danel. Nine  
years later they ambushed the expedition of the Hudson Bay  
147 Company under John Work, and he returned to the Nez  
Perces country after losing a number of his men.

In 1832 occurred the Battle of Pierre's Hole in which  
William Sublette took a conspicuous part, and in which the  
148 Blackfeet were said to have lost twenty-six warriors.

It is said that the failure of Lee and Frost,  
Methodist missionaries to the Northwest in 1834, to establish  
a mission among the Salish, was because of fear of the  
depredations of the Blackfeet, together with a desire  
for "a larger field of usefulness than that offered by  
149 a single tribe".

But a small number of the Blackfeet were friendly to  
the Jesuits, though Father De Smet and Father Point did  
considerable work among them in 1846, (See chapter VI  
for account) and St. Peter's mission was not established  
on a permanent foundation till 1859.

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145. Thompson, op. cit., p. 373.

146. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 153.

147. Work, op. cit., p. 150.

148. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 659. "These were  
Greensventre and not Blackfeet."

149. Lee and Frost, Ten Years in Oregon (New York, 1844)  
p. 187.

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In the accounts of Maximilian was found that of an expedition sent out from Fort McKensie to trade with the Kootenai, but which was cut off by the Alouas when about two days on the route. Their trapping grounds and passes were not for the whites, and Maximilian learning that he would be obliged to pass through country occupied by hostile Indians in order to get into the Rocky Mountains, where he planned on passing the winter, turned back down the Missouri.

The inter-tribal wars were caused largely by the love of the buffalo whose grazing grounds were in eastern Montana to which territory the Blackfeet laid claim. Here for many years a three-cornered struggle took place between the Salish on the West, the Crow on the Southwest and the Blackfeet on the North. These tribes, like the Blackfeet, were dependent upon the buffalo for subsistence and came to the favorite hunting ground between the Yellowstone and the Missouri for their bi-annual supply of meat and robes.

Indian wars with the whites were the inevitable results of the contact of two different and incompatible civilizations. Both could not exist on the same soil; naturally the stronger would replace the weaker. Occasional conflicts, as stated above, had occurred from

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150. Maximilian, op. cit., vol. 23, p. 133-54.



the day when the first explorers and trappers penetrated the Blackfoot domain. But so long as the white incursions were temporary and infrequent the Indian's way was not threatened. However, when the miner, the stockman, the farmer took up their permanent homes in the West, a new era dawned for the Blackfeet.

But with the signing of the Stevens treaty 1888,<sup>151</sup> the Blackfeet limited themselves to the territory north of the Missouri; whites were allowed to pass through their country unmolested; a common hunting ground was mapped out; the Blackfeet were to receive \$35,000 for ten years; and a right-of-way for road construction was agreed upon.

A few years of peace followed after the signing of the Stevens treaty; but with the steady influx of the whites into the restricted territory without regard to treaties or reservation boundaries, Indian unrest on the plains became general. Military occupation became necessary and a military road was considered to facilitate the movement of soldiers. Since troops could be transported by steamboat for a long distance far up the Missouri and Columbia rivers, it was planned to connect<sup>152</sup> these two natural highways with a wagon road. The

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151. Kappeler, op. cit., vol. 2., p. 736.

152. Capt. John Mullan, Report of Construction of Military Road from Fort Benton to Walla Walla, (Washington, D. C., 1865) p. 7.

actual construction of this road was begun by Capt. John Mullan in 1859, and was to extend from Fort Benton to Walla Walla. This road was completed in 1860, one year after the first steamboat arrived at Fort Benton. It is of interest to know that this road crossed the Little Blackfoot pass, later known as Mullan pass, where Capt. Mullan formerly surveyed with the Stevens' expedition of 1853-54 for the Northern Pacific survey.

Hardly had the military road been completed when gold was discovered in Idaho and in the valleys of the head waters of the Missouri. Thousands of miners and prospectors rushed into the territory to possess themselves of the mineral treasures. This influx of the whites alarmed the Blackfeet, for the rights and interests of the Indians were wholly lost sight of. The red man was treated as an alien and an outlaw. The natural result was that when the Indian could, he retaliated, and raids, thievery and robbery were committed not only by the Blackfeet but by other tribes and by the whites as well. Indian outbreaks were promptly punished, and though these raids did not result in open warfare, the Blackfeet were slowly but surely being pushed back on their territory to make room for the ever increasing whites.

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153. Bradley, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 150.

The Blackfeet tried agriculture,<sup>183a</sup> but a period of drought made their rather poor reserve unproductive. Their annuities were either slow in being paid, or paid at times<sup>183b</sup> of depreciated currency. There came no promised schools<sup>183c</sup> and few of the blessings of civilization.<sup>184</sup> As usual the

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- 183a. Report of Secy. of Interior, 33rd Cong. 2nd Sess. Senate Doc. No. 1. (Report of Doty submitted by Gov. Stevens, for "Proposed Farm and Agency in the Blackfoot Nation, 1864.") p. 413. See also James H. Bradley, op. cit., vol. 8, p. 155. "The Blackfoot Agency was built in 1863 on Sun River by Col. Vaughan. Several dwellings were constructed for the Indians and a farm was fenced and improved. Little Dog, a Piegan Chief, afterwards killed by his own people . . . farmed some, as did a few of the Indians, but they attempted to raise no stock except horses. This agency was burned out by the Piegans in the winter of 1864-65, when the agent removed to Fort Benton. The Blackfoot Agency on the Teton was built in 1869."
- 183b. Chittenden, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 360. "During the Civil War, when the currency depreciated so much, the annuities shrank in quantity as prices went up, and the Indian was a heavy loser from causes that he could not comprehend. The annuities usually were sent up the river in the boats of the American Fur Company. The agents were given no separate warehouse . . . the goods became mixed with those of the traders, and the Indian paid in furs for what he was entitled to receive as a free gift." See p. 350-1 "Annuities" undelivered.
- 183c. Report of Com. of Indian Affairs for year 1873. No. 40, p. 252. "School was opened at Blackfoot Agency in September 1872, with an enrollment of 23 pupils, and B. W. Sanders as teacher."
184. George W. Manypenny, Our Indian Wars (Cincinnati, 1890) p. 274.

government made no effort to carry out its part of the treaty. For several years the Blackfeet were left without an agent, and by 1863 there was considerable unrest among them.<sup>154a</sup> No provision was made for paying them for their ceded lands. Yet, in spite of these delinquencies, Superintendent A. Cummings reported in 1867 that they had shown no signs of hostilities.

In 1866 the Blackfeet offered to help General Sully<sup>154b</sup> whip the Sioux who were causing considerable trouble.

In 1866-67 these Indians in common with other tribes whose living depended upon the chase, suffered from want of ammunition<sup>154c</sup> and supplies, they having been withheld by the government because of war with the Sioux. Yet there was no outbreak. The next year the white population

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154a. Bradley, op. cit., p. 149-150, vol. 7. "In the year 1863 the Blackfeet bands began to be troublesome . . . began to drive off stock and then allow it to be ransomed. This passed to open hostilities, and murders became frequent on both sides. No general war seems to have been waged . . . but this state of semi-war lasted from 1863 to 1870, terminating in the severe chastisement of the Piegons by Col. Baker in January, 1870."

154b. James P. Boyd, Recent Indian Wars (Publishers Union, 1891) p. 111.

154c. Ibid., p. 112. "These Indians suffered from want of ammunition and supplies, they having been withheld by the government on account of war with the Sioux."

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around Fort Benton began outrages which were well  
calculated to incite the Blackfeet to war.

In July, 1868, the Pieguns had signed a treaty with  
Major William J. Cullen, special Indian Agent, at Fort  
Benton. This treaty, however, was never ratified. 156

Immediately after this treaty Mountain Chief, the prin-  
cipal chief of the Pieguns, while visiting at Fort Benton  
was insulted and abused in an outrageous manner by some  
whites whose only reason for their conduct was the fact  
that this chief had asked the commissioner to exclude  
certain men from the Indian Country. This insult in-  
censed the Pieguns, or at least part of that band, to  
revenge. They raided Diamond City and stole a band of  
horses.

157  
This state of semi-warfare seems to have lasted  
for several years, beginning in 1863 and not terminating  
until the severe chastisement of the Pieguns by Colonel  
Baker in January, 1870.

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156. Mannypenny, op. cit., p. 276. "I cannot include  
in the Indian hostilities the highway robbery of  
the mail and express trains reported, for it was  
done by white brigands. The Blackfeet and Bloods  
and even part of the Pieguns remained perfectly  
quiet, protesting that they had nothing to do with  
the attacks on the persons and property of the  
white men, and are ready to stay on whatever reser-  
vation may be assigned to them." (Report of Gen.  
De Trobriand, military commander in Montana, Sept.  
10, 1868.)
156. 40th Cong. 3rd Sess. (ser. 1368) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 3,  
p. 675.
157. Bradley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 143.

According to the various reports of Indian agents<sup>158</sup> and other officials, these depredations appear to have been carried on by but one band of the Piepans, doubtless this same band of Mountain Chief's; many horses were stolen, the government farm on Sun River was burned, and several murders were committed.

In response to several appeals, United States troops<sup>159</sup> were ordered up the Missouri, and Fort Shaw was established in June, 1867 on Sun River. Three months later Fort Ellis<sup>159a</sup> was established on the East Gallatin River. These posts were established to keep open the route from Fort Benton to Helena and for the protection of settlers and miners against the raids of the Indians through the mountain passes.

In spite of the establishment of Fort Shaw, trouble still continued and spread along the Yellowstone, where John Bozeman was killed en route to Fort Smith during the same year. The failure of the United States troops

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158. Report of Sec. of Interior, 39th Cong. 2nd. Sess. H. Ex. Doc. No. 81, p. 202. (Excerpt of letter of Agent Upham) "The number of horses stolen by the Blackfeet reached the thousands. Haff was murdered on government farm, also Fitzpatrick at the Jesuit Mission."
159. Report of the Hygiene of the U. S. Army with Descriptions of Military Posts. War Dept., Surgeon-General's Office, May, 1875, Washington, p. 430.
- 159a. Ibid., p. 404.

to keep peace in this region led to greater activity on the part of volunteers called for by Acting Governor Meagher, but they were unable to do much in the way of preserving peace.

During the year of 1869 the Piegan band of Mountain Chief seemed to grow more hostile, and the highways between Fort Benton and Helena were infected with marauding bands of whites as well as Indians. Lives were taken on both sides,<sup>160</sup> "but the most experienced agents and officers are of the opinion that more than five Indian lives were taken for every white man that was murdered during the season."

161

General De Trobriand, who was a military commander in Montana at the time, September, 1869, had spent two weeks travelling about the territory and at military posts speaks of the Indian trouble: "The attack of two white men, who died of their wounds at Fort Benton; the execution of two bad Indians, and the murder of two other innocent ones at the same place; the murder of Mr. Clark, and the attempted murder of his son by a party of Piegons, led by Peter, an Indian brother-in-law of Mr. Clark, the son of Mountain Chief, Bear Child, and others not well known. This is the bloody denouement

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160. Manypenny, op. cit., p. 291.

161. Ibid., p. 276. (Gen. De Trobriand.)

of a long-standing family quarrel." These assurances General De Trobriand said came to him through the agencies, and were so far corroborated by the peaceful attitude of the tribes above named in footnote 165. He further stated that in his opinion the hostilities and depredations rested exclusively on a band of Piegons and some roving vagabonds of different tribes, "acting on their own hook, and independent of their own people."

This opinion was further strengthened by a statement of Mr. Culbertson,<sup>162</sup> long a factor for the American Fur Company at Fort Benton, who had married a Piegon woman and was intimately acquainted with the Blackfeet tribes, and their disposition and temper.

The event, however, that brought the thing to a climax was the murder of Malcolm Clark,<sup>163</sup> at the

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162. Report of Sec. of War submitting Culbertson report regarding Piegons, in 41st Cong., 2nd. Sess., H. Ex. Doc., p. 6-7. "Sept. 2, 1869. I have recently arrived from the interior where I have been since last winter with the Bloods and Blackfeet Indians. These people are perfectly friendly to the whites, and, up to the time I left evinced no disposition to be otherwise. My knowledge of these people will not permit me to think that there exists a general hostility among them; these depredations have been committed by a portion of the young rabble, over whom the chiefs have no control . . . The non-ratification of treaties with these Indians has had anything but a tendency to keep them quiet."

163. Montana Historical Society, vol. 2, p. 255.



the mouth of Frickly Bear Canyon, not far distant from Helena, on the 23rd of August, 1868, and culminated in what was known as the Piegan war of 1868-70. <sup>163</sup>

The failure of the band of Mountain Chief to surrender the murderers of Clark, found guilty by the grand jury <sup>164</sup> of the United <sup>States</sup> for the third judicial district of Montana, caused General Sully, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Montana, to ask for aid. General Sully was advised to demand the murderers from the tribe, and if refused to capture them. In compliance with orders General Sully held a council with the Piegans at the Blackfoot Agency on the Teton. This band promised to deliver the murderers within a few days, but instead allowed them to escape.

Convinced that the Piegans chiefs had acted in bad faith General Sully notified General De Trobriand, commanding in Montana, who in turn communicated with General Sheridan. It was decided to strike the Piegans at once. <sup>165</sup> The expedition was put in charge of Colonel E. M. Baker of the 2nd Cavalry at Fort Ellis. Early in January, Colonel Baker left the post with four companies of cavalry and proceeded to Fort Shaw where he was re-inforced by two companies of mounted infantry.

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- 163a. Report of Sec. of Interior of General Sully, Mo. At, in 41st Cong., 3rd. Sess.  
164. Michael A. Lesson, HISTORY OF MONTANA (Chicago, 1885) p. 124.  
165. Report of Sec. of War containing report of Gen. Sheridan, in 41st. Cong., 2nd. Sess., H. Ex. Doc. No. 269, pp. 1, 7, 8.

Leaving Fort Shaw on January 19th, Colonel Baker five days later reached the Marias where the Pieguns were encamped. Coming upon an Indian village, in the darkness, the soldiers fell upon the lodges of Big Horn and Bear Chief whose village was quarantined for smallpox. The attack was a complete surprise; one hundred and seventy-five Indians were killed,<sup>100</sup> of which seventy-three were women and children, and three-hundred horses were taken. Leaving Lieutenant Doane with a detachment to destroy the camp, Colonel Baker went down the river in search of Mountain Chief's camp, but he found only deserted lodges.

Though Mountain Chief and perhaps the worst of the Piegan offenders escaped this punishment, they caused little or no trouble thereafter.

The punishment of the Pieguns was regarded by many as a parallel case with the Sand Creek massacre of 1864.<sup>100a</sup> The Pieguns were subdued, but with what an exhibition of savagery at the hands of a civilised government.

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100. Report of Sec. of War containing report of Gen. Baker, in Allet. Cong., and. Sess., H. R. Doc. No. 269, p. 73.  
100a. J. P. Dunn, Massacres of the Mountains, (New York, 1886) p. 531.

## Chapter XII

### GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Not far distant from the spot where Father De Smet had brought the Blackfeet and Sellish together at the confluence of the Judith and the Missouri Rivers in 1846, a federal treaty was consummated nine years later.

This was brought about by Isaac I. Stevens, <sup>167</sup>governor of Washington territory, who made the first survey of the country of western Montana. This expedition was commissioned by the United States Government to make explorations and surveys <sup>168</sup>for a railroad route from the Mississippi to the Pacific and also treat <sup>169a</sup>with

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167. Eugene Smalley, History of the Northern Pacific Railroad, (New York, 1883) ch. 5.  
168. Howard Stevens, Life of Gen. Isaac Stevens, 2 vols. (1900 N. Y.) vol. 1, p. 282.  
169a. Report of Explorations and Survey for a Railroad Route from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean. Senate Ex. Doc. No. 78. 33rd Cong. 2nd Sess. Report of Isaac I. Stevens, vol. 1, p. 147.

the Indian tribes along the route concerning the setting aside of Reservations and establishing of peace truces, particularly between the Salish and the Blackfeet. The incessant conflicts going on among the various tribes on both sides of the Rockies made the country unsafe for travellers and for immigration, and it was Governor Stevens' plan to bring this unfortunate situation to an end.

Thus we shall see that Stevens was under the jurisdiction of three departments: the State Department had control of his activities as governor of Washington Territory;<sup>169</sup> the Interior Department had jurisdiction over superintendents of Indian Affairs; and the War Department was in charge of the survey for a Pacific railroad.

Early in 1853 Governor Stevens left Washington and proceeded westward by way of Fort Union and Fort Benton to assume the duties of governor of Washington Territory. On this westward journey in August of that year he held a council with the Gros Ventres on the Milk River,<sup>169a</sup> and met 30 of the Blackfeet and Piegan chiefs at Fort Benton in September. Already the idea of settling the quarrels between the Blackfeet, Bloods, Piegans and Gros Ventres

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169. Hazard Stevens, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 231, 232.

169a. Ibid., 1, p. 357.

east of the Rocky Mountains, and the Flatheads, Kootenais, Nez Percés and other tribes west of the mountains by means of a general council was formulated in Governor Stevens' <sup>1899</sup>mind. He conferred with the various tribes, talking to them about the changing conditions of the life of the Indians, and brought before them the idea of the reservation policy, and opening the way for the council of peace.

At this council with the Blackfeet in September, 1885, Governor Stevens addressed them in the same strain as other tribes with whom he was arranging a Great peace council: "Your Great Father has sent me to bear a message to you and all his children. It is that he wishes you to live at peace with each other and the whites, protect all the whites passing through your country, and the Great Father will be your fast friend." These Blackfeet chiefs, among <sup>1899</sup>whom were Little Dog and Low Horn, promised individually to cease sending their war parties against other tribes, and to respect all whites travelling through their country, and to induce the whole nation to do likewise.

Governor Stevens' policy was one of great beneficence to the Indians, protected their interests, and provided for their improvement and eventual civilization,

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<sup>1899</sup>B. Stevens, Op. cit., p. 373-374.  
<sup>1899</sup>C. Stevens, Issue I, Report of Survey, Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 147.

while at the same time it opened the country for settlement by the whites.

The salient features of his policy were as follows:

189d

To concentrate the Indians upon a few reservations, and encourage them to cultivate the soil and adopt civilized habits.

To pay for their lands not in money, but in annuities of blankets, clothing, and useful articles during a long term of years. To furnish them with schools, teachers, farming implements, blacksmiths, and carpenters, with shops of those trades.

To prohibit wars and disputes among them.

To abolish slavery.

To stop as far as possible the use of liquor.

To retain right of fishing and hunting on unoccupied land as long as it remained vacant.

The lands of the reservations were to be allotted to them in severalty at some future time when they should have become fitted for it.

Two years were to elapse before the peace council became a reality,<sup>189e</sup> but at last by the Act of July 31, 1854,<sup>189f</sup>

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189d. Stevens, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 454.

189e. Ibid. p. 374.

189f. U. S. S. L. p. 330. 1854, 33rd. Cong. 2nd. Sess.

eighty thousand dollars had been appropriated for that purpose and the council was authorized. Governor I. Stevens and Alfred Cummings, superintendent of Indian Affairs, and afterwards governor of Utah, had been appointed commissioners to effect the treaty with the Blackfoot. The necessary gifts for the Indians were purchased, the American Fur Company was awarded the contract for their transportation, and Commissioner Cummings and party left St. Louis on the steamboat St. Mary, bound for Fort Benton, where the council had been called to meet.

Accompanying Commissioner Cummings were Major Culbertson and Indian Agents Vaughn and Hatch. At Fort Union the goods were transferred to keelboats for Fort Benton, while the passengers took wagons for the same destination. Arriving at Milk River crossing, the party met Governor Stevens just returning from the Pacific Coast, and here the commissioners arranged the details of their organization, though not without a great deal of dispute as to who should take the precedence, Stevens finally yielding. In the dispute, however, an ill feeling was engendered and their subsequent work lacked harmony.

From the Milk River the party proceeded to Fort Benton, arriving there the latter part of August. Here Commissioner Cummings accepted an invitation

to stop at the fort, but Governor Stevens, declining, camped with his party outside. But the Indian goods, so essential to all councils, were delayed by low water in the Missouri--early October found the goods still en route up the river. Their tardy arrival forced the Indians to take to hunting, and game grew scarce. To facilitate matters, Governor Stevens decided to move the council from Fort Benton to the junction of the Judith and Missouri rivers,<sup>169g</sup> about one hundred miles east. The move was made, and in October, 1855, Governor Stevens was to witness the accomplishment of several years of unceasing effort among the Indians.

Numerous circles of tepees appeared along the plains of the Missouri and at the mouth of the Judith. Eight tribes, Blackfeet, Bloods, Piegons, Gros Ventres, Nez Perces, Kootenais, Fond d'Oreilles, and Flatheads were<sup>170</sup> peacefully assembled to participate in the Federal treaty between Alfred Cummings, and Isaac I. Stevens, commissioners duly appointed and authorized on the part of the United States, and the chiefs and delegates of the above mentioned nations and tribes of Indians.

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169g. Stevens, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 110.

170. Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, ed. by Charles J. Kappler, 2 vols. (Washington, 1904) vol. 2, p. 736.  
55th Cong. 2nd Sess. Sen. Doc. No. 319, Vol. 33.



The council was formally opened on October 17, 1855, and it was estimated by the commissioners that 16,000 Indians were parties to this treaty,<sup>171</sup> of which 11,500 were Blackfeet.

The Blackfoot Council was remarkable for the good will that characterized this meeting. Low Horn, chief of the Piegons, was the first Indian to extend the hand of welcome and friendship to the western Indians as they crossed the mountains on the way to the council.

This treaty<sup>172</sup> (Article I) provided for the maintenance of peace between the signatory tribes and the citizens of the United States.

Article II provided that the signatory tribes should remain at peace with one another, and also with the non-signatory tribes, such as the Grows, Sioux, and Assiniboins.

Article III created a common hunting ground from Blackfoot territory bounded by lines drawn from the Hall Gate or Medicine Rock Passes in the main range of the Rocky Mountains east to the nearest source of the Musselshell River; thence to the mouth of Twenty-

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171. Hazard Stevens, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 115.

172. Kappler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 736.

five Yard Creek; thence up the Yellowstone river to its northern source, and thence along the main range of the Rocky Mountains to the point of beginning. <sup>173</sup> (See map No. 303 indicates common hunting ground.)

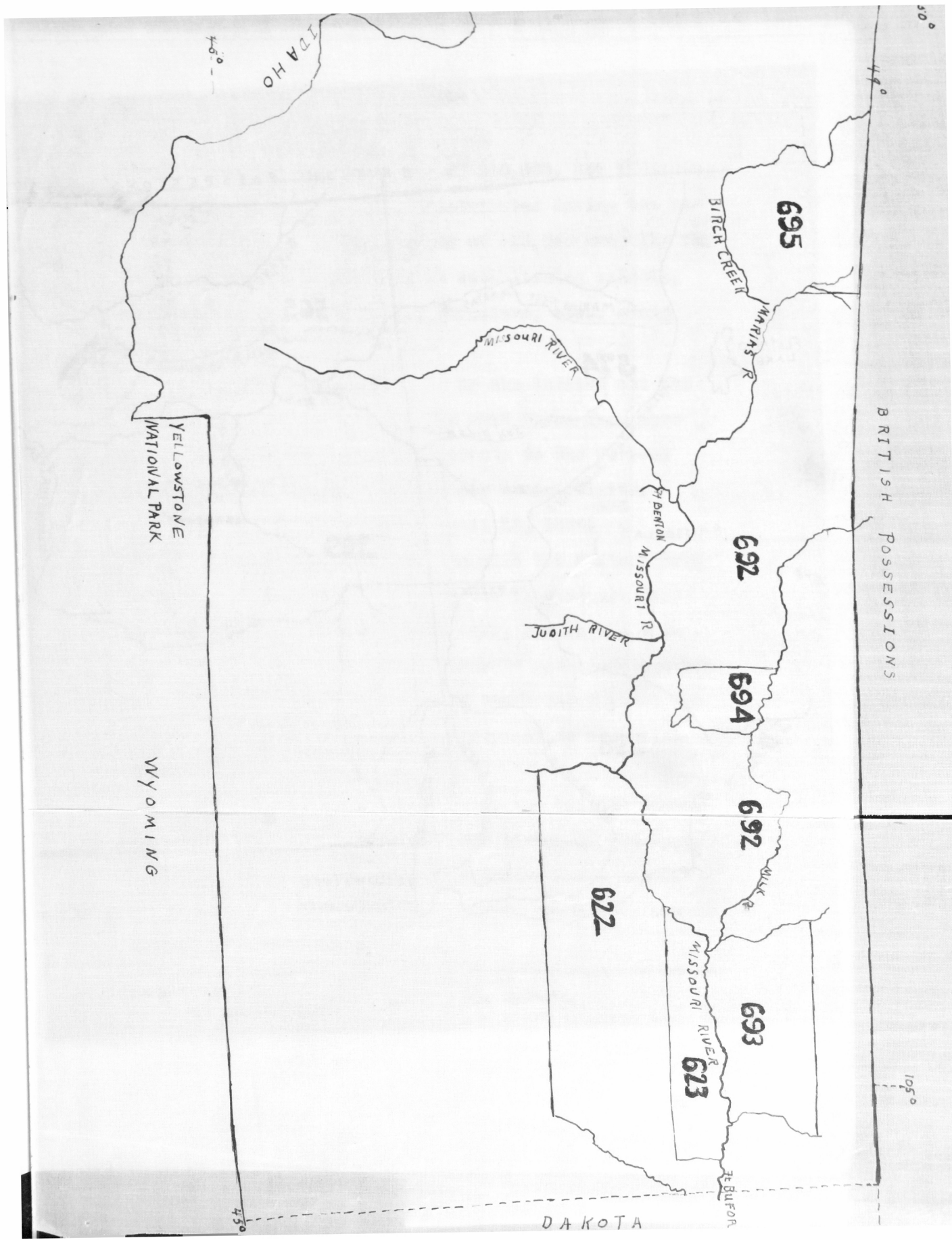
Article IV defined the Blackfoot country, and provided that the territory, within lines drawn from Hell Gate or Medicine Rock passes easterly to the nearest source of the Musselshell River, down that river to its mouth, down the Missouri to the mouth of the Milk River, due north to the forty-ninth parallel, west along forty-ninth parallel to the main range of the Rocky Mountains, and south to the Hell Gate Pass, should be the Blackfoot Indians' territory, <sup>174</sup> subject, however, to rights guaranteed other bands or tribes. (See map. Nos. 399, 503, 574 indicate Blackfoot territory.)

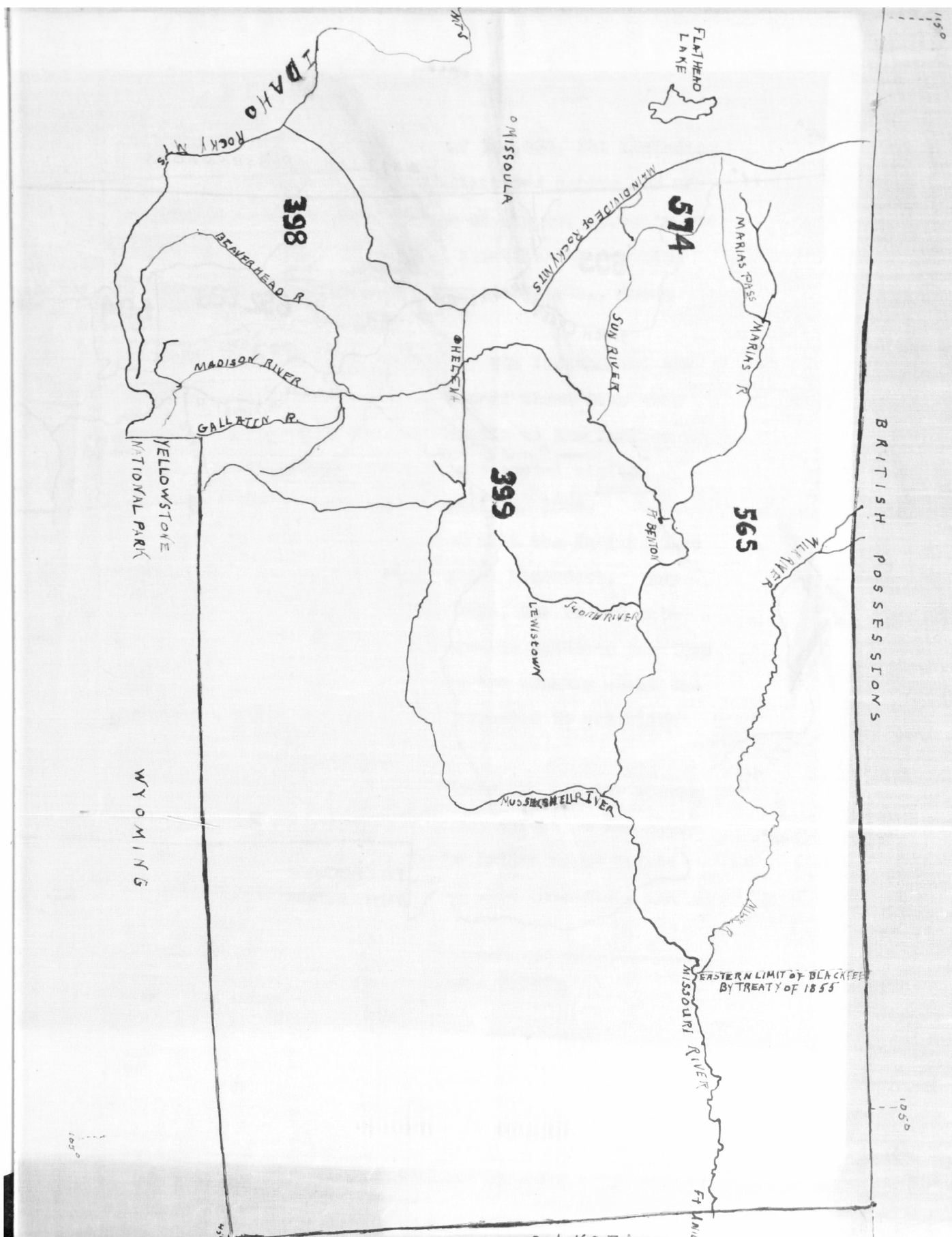
The Indians west of the main range of the Rocky Mountains agreed not to hunt in, or travel through, any part of this common hunting ground or return home through any pass in the main range of the Rocky Mountains north of Hell Gate or Medicine Rock passes.

Articles VIII, IX, and X provided that the United States receive permission to build roads, utilize natural resources, etc., on condition that the Government expend

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173. Charles C. Hoyer, op. cit., pt. 2, p. 39.  
174. Ibid., p. 39.





annually for ten years the sum of \$20,000, not including the goods, provisions, etc., distributed during the negotiations of the treaty. A sum of \$10,000 annually for ten years was to be expended in establishing schools, agricultural and mechanical instructors, etc., among them.

The treaty being agreed to by the Indians and the Commissioners on October 17, the next three days were spent in the distribution of presents to the various chiefs, speech-making, and friendly social visits.

176

This treaty was ratified April 15, 1856.

It is said that few treaties with the Indians have been so well observed as this by the Blackfeet. They took no part in the Great Sioux war, nor in the outbreak of Joseph. They were afterwards gathered together on a large reservation, including the country about the Sun River, where the government proposed to establish their farm.

With the signing of this treaty the annuity system came into extensive vogue among the tribes of the Upper Missouri, and also the era of the Indian agent began. The change, so far as the Indians were concerned, was a change for the worse.

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176. Kappeler, op. cit., p. 2, pp. 737-38.  
176. Ibid., p. 736.

### Chapter XIII

#### THE TREATY-ANNUITY-AGENCY SYSTEM

During the years following the Stevens' treaty of 1855, the Blackfeet preserved a strict peace with the whites, though there was a disposition to carry on war with the Crows and the Assiniboin<sup>177</sup>s. The Bloods were at first inclined to pay little attention to their promises, as to these Indians; but on finding that the Piegan and Gros Ventres were maintaining their treaty, they abandoned their designs, and the only trouble thereafter between the tribes was caused by young men who would not listen to the advice of their chiefs and older warriors. These gradually decreased in frequency, and faith with

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177. Report of Sec. of Interior, 34th Cong. 3rd. Sess., Senate Ex. Doc. No. 5, 1856-57, (Ser. 815).

the government was so admirably kept that in 1860, the Blackfeet were pronounced "the most peaceful nation on the Missouri."<sup>177a</sup>

However, with the ratification of the Stevens treaty of 1865, there came into extensive vogue among the tribes of the upper Missouri the treaty-annuity-agency system. It probably gave rise to more abuse than any other one thing in the conduct of Indian affairs. The temptations of fraud were great, and a perusal of our management of Indian affairs shows utter mismanagement, stupidity, and graft which thrived for many years, particularly in the Grant administration.

The Blackfeet were now wards of the government. All of the territory north of the Missouri and Musselshell rivers, consisting of the choicest agricultural land, was set aside for their exclusive use. This as we shall see was to cause trouble later on.

Men from the far east who knew little of Indian affairs were usually selected for Indian agents, the best known perhaps being E. A. Hatch, A. J. Vaughan, Oad Upson, Hiram Upham, George Wright, Ensign, Armitage, May, who were perhaps the most efficient, but there were many who sought the business solely for "what there was

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177a. Report of Sec. of Interior, 38th Cong. 2nd Sess. Senate ex. Doc. No. 1 (Ser. 1078), p. 309.

in it". The spoils system came into absolute control of the agencies, and fitness received scant consideration. An examination of the annual report of the agents show haphazard management and a lack of fixed procedure or practical business. Each new agent criticised the work of his predecessor, tried out new schemes which ultimately failed and made way for a successor.

Major Maginnis, <sup>1877b</sup> our delegate to Congress in 1874, who said he had personal knowledge of the operations of the Indian bureau and Indian agents, states: "They will take a barrel of sugar to an Indian tribe and get a receipt for ten barrels. For a sack of flour the Indians sign a receipt for fifty sacks. The agent will march three hundred head of cattle four times through a corral, get a receipt for twelve hundred head, give a part of them to the Indians, sell part to a white man, and steal as many back as possible."

<sup>1877c</sup> The Indian annuities were brought up the river on boats of the traders each year, generally in those of the American Fur Company. These annuities (ratione, clothing, and farming utensils) were to be issued quarterly, and they were to receive large sums of money as indemnity

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- 1877b. Granville Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier, Ed. Paul C. Phillips, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1925) vol. 2, p. 80.
- 1877c. Report of Gen. Alfred Sully, Com. of Indian Affairs, August, 1864. "This system of issuing annuity goods is one grand humbug."



for lands relinquished to the government. But the Indian had no hand in awarding the contract for transportation of goods to his country, nor any means of seeing that he received what he was entitled to. He was obliged to accept what the agent saw fit to give him. Neither was the agent given an escort or a separate warehouse. Consequently the goods became mixed with those of the trader, and the Indian paid in furs for what he was entitled to as a free gift. "It is doubtful if, during the period 1850 to 1870, the Indian tribes along the Missouri River received more than half the bounty which was promised them by the government." With the depreciation of the currency during the Civil War, the annuities shrank in quantity as the price advanced, and the Indian was a heavy loser from causes that he could not comprehend.

To add further to the troubles of the Blackfeet, whiskey traders frequented the reservation. <sup>177d</sup> Selling whiskey to the Indians was forbidden by the government, but owing to the great distance and the sparsely settled country they operated in comparative safety. The Indian agents one and all complained of the whiskey traffic, but seemed to have been powerless to prevent it. Much of the money paid the Blackfeet for lands found its way into the

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177d. Report of Sec. of Interior. 40th Cong. 2nd Sess.  
(Ser. 1336) vol. 3, p. 253. Report of Agent Wright.

pockets of these bootleggers.

In compliance with the treaty of 1855, the government appropriated funds for the establishment of a farm for the Blackfeet.<sup>178</sup> The place selected for the farming operations was in the Sun River valley, about sixty miles south of Fort Benton. Here in the fall of 1855, under the direction of Alfred J. Vaughan, Indian Agent, suitable building and necessary enclosures for stock were erected. Farming was tried by the agency people but without success.<sup>179</sup> The climate was too dry to permit successful farming without irrigation, and there was no money with which to defray the expenses of making ditches. One chief, Little Dog, tried to cultivate eight or ten acres, but his crops failed and he quit in disgust. The Sun River farm, as the agriculture experiment in their country was called,<sup>180</sup> fell into decay, but it is said that the agency farmer made a comfortable living by keeping a hotel and trading

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178. Report of Sec. of Interior, Sept. 1855. 35th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 997) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 2, p. 431.

Albert Vaughn report.

179. Report of Sec. of Interior, Oct. 1862. 37th Cong. 3rd Sess. (Ser. 1187) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 2, p. 384. Agent Reed. "The government farm on Sun River has been of no practical value to the Indians."

180. Report of Sec. of Interior, Sept. 1864. 38th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 1280) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 5, p. 436. Agt. Upson. "In no place did I find in this agency a worse state of affairs than on "Sun River Farm": here the grossest neglect was apparent; buildings were in dilapidated condition. Only a little stock of the poorest kind remained."

with the Indians.

Because of trouble with the Sioux in 1863, guns and ammunition were withheld, and their supply of meat was becoming ever harder to secure. The tribes fell out among themselves and trouble developed between the Gros Ventres and the Piegans.<sup>181</sup> No agent having been in the country<sup>182</sup> for over eighteen months prior to December, 1863, the Blackfeet began to feel that they had been forgotten by their "Great Father", and expressed themselves to that effect. This feeling was further aggravated by the failure on the part of the contractors to deliver their annuities during 1863,<sup>183</sup> and led the Indians to believe that the government did not intend to carry out the treaty obligations. Still there was no war with the whites, and in the spring of 1864 the Blackfeet showed their good will by offering to aid General Sully in fighting the Sioux.

However, with the changed conditions brought about in the sixties by the discovery of gold in the territory, the survey and development of the railroad, and the new wave of population into the west the whole situation was fast becoming serious for the Blackfeet. In May, 1864,

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181. Report of Sec. of Interior. Sept. 1864. Agent Hosen. p. 437.

182. Ibid.

183. Ibid., p. 437-438.

the white population had so increased that Montana was cut off from Idaho and organized as a separate territory. The wild game was being driven from their hunting grounds. The appropriations made for them were slow in coming and were inadequate for their needs. In anxiety and poverty small bands of Blackfeet were wandering restlessly about their ever decreasing territory, resenting the encroachments of the whites. The young men were getting into much mischief plundering the miner's small boats, stealing horses from the ranchers, and robbing the lone travelers on the trail.<sup>184</sup> In April, 1886, they stole forty horses from Fort Benton. In the following May they stole all the horses and mules from the Sun River farm, and that school for agriculture was abandoned.<sup>185</sup> In the same month a party of Bloods attacked and killed ten men who were cutting logs on the Marias.<sup>186</sup> (See Chapter XI.) These hostilities were confined to small bands only. These tribes were stronger than the whites, and the young braves clamored for war.

But the chiefs desired peace that would mean safety<sup>187</sup> and less poverty for their people. This led to a treaty

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184. Report of Sec. of Interior, Oct. 1886, 39th Cong. 1st Sess. (Ser. 1886) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 2, p. 606.

185. Report of Sec. of Interior, 1886-87, 39th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 1886) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 2, p. 803.

Agt. Upham report.

186. Ibid., p. 196.

187. Ibid., p. 202.

with the Blackfeet in the fall of 1866 made by Gad Upson, Indian agent, which superseded the Stevens treaty of 1855. This treaty was made for a cession of the country claimed<sup>188</sup> by them, lying south of the Missouri, the object being to throw open to settlement a section supposed to contain precious metal. This treaty was never ratified, the Indians having soon after violated its stipulations by renewed hostilities.

According to the report of Hiram Upham, Deputy Agent for the Blackfeet in 1866, hostilities continued among some of the tribes, and several acts of violence were committed in the early part of the year, but hostilities<sup>189</sup> were brought to a close by the order stopping the sale and issue of ammunition because of trouble with the Sioux<sup>190</sup> as mentioned above, together with the non-issuance of supplies that had been expected under the new treaty.

The year 1867 and 1868 passed with a fairly peaceful condition of affairs in the Blackfoot nation. The whiskey traffic, it is said, flourished at Fort Benton as it had

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188. Report of Sec. of Interior, 1867. 40th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 1326) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 3, p. 13. Cham. R. Mix, Commissioner.

189. Ibid., p. 257.

190. Ibid., p. 257. "The goods received by me seemed to be mere presents . . . I delivered the goods to the Blackfeet early in the spring, as they had been in a starving condition during the winter and almost naked. They had few horses for their hunt; they had been peaceful under the death of their relatives by the whites. Agt. Wright."

190a  
never flourished before. In July of 1868, Major William J. Cullen, special Indian commissioner, made  
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another treaty with the Blackfeet. This treaty, similar to the one of 1866, was never ratified. Immediately after this treaty, Mountain Chief, the principal chief of the Piegan, while visiting at Fort Benton was insulted and abused in an outrageous manner by some whites, whose only reason for their conduct was the fact that this chief, in council, had asked the commissioner to have certain men sent out of the Indian country. For this insult to their chief, the young men of the Piegan tribe were determined to be avenged, and this culminated in the Piegan war. (See chapter XI.)

There was much controversy at this time in regard to relations with the Indians. In general the West wanted a stern policy of punishment or of extermination. Also the first legislative assembly in Montana, meeting

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- 190a. Report of Sec. of Interior, July, 1888, 40th Cong. 3rd Sess. (Ser. 1366) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 3, p. 663.  
Report of Geo. B. Wright, Agent of Blackfeet.  
"During last winter king alcohol held high carnival . . . It was a painful sight to witness the debauchery of the Indians, made so by liquor given them by the whites in exchange for peltries. I endeavored to suppress the traffic by obtaining military assistance, but failed."
191. Report of Sec. of Interior, 40th Cong. 3rd Sess. (Ser. 1366) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 3, p. 676.

in 1864, complained in a memorial to Congress<sup>192</sup> that only a small fragment of the territory was open to settlement. By 1867 the Montana legislature<sup>193</sup> was urging Congress to get these Indians onto a reservation. The East, moved by philanthropic motives, considered the white man the aggressor and therefore stood for peaceful measures. Some wanted the management of Indian affairs transferred to the war department, while others thought civilians would be more successful in dealing with the tribes. Indian agents blamed the military for the sad state of affairs, and the army men reversed the charge.

At the bottom of the difficulty, however, was the inevitable consequences of the westward migration of the whites. The Blackfeet were being compressed, their best hunting grounds depleted.

Actuated by the general unrest among the plains Indians, and the Chivington affair of 1864, Congress<sup>194</sup> created a Commission on the Condition of Indian Tribes which began its work in March, 1865. This Commission visited the west and reported its findings in January,

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192. Laws of Mont. T., 1864, Sess. 1, p. 721.

193. Laws of Mont. T., 1867, Sess. 3, p. 268-269.

194. Stat. L. 40th Cong. Sess. 1, Ch. 32. p. 17, 1867.

1867, which were to the effect that the principle of permitting the Indians to exist as roving tribes was no longer tenable. They saw the poverty and homelessness of the once wild tribes, and the impossibility of maintaining peace without giving them better security and support. It was imperative that peace be maintained on the plains, not only that the trains might be operated without interruption, but that the miner, the trader, the long caravans of immigrants be protected as well.

As a result of the findings of this Commission,  
188  
Congress created a Peace Commission in the summer of 1867, with instructions to restore peace on the plains, to secure an unimpeded right of way for the railroad and to recommend a permanent policy for dealing with the Indians.

Pursuant to this policy President Grant in his first message in 1869 said: "No matter what ought to be the relation between such civilized settlements and the aborigines, the fact is they do not harmonize well, and one or the other has to give way in the end. A situation which looks to the extermination of a race is too horrible for a nation to adopt without entailing

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188. 40th Cong. Sess. 3, (Ser. 1366) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 2, p. 486-487.



upon itself the wrath of all Christendom and engendering in the citizen a disregard for human life and the rights of others, dangerous to society. I see no substitute for such a system, except in placing all the Indians on large reservations as rapidly as can be done, and giving them absolute protection there."

In accordance with the policy by ~~Executive Order~~ of July 5, 1873, a treaty was made with the Blackfoot Nation which established definite boundaries and set apart a reserve for Gros Ventres, Piegan, Blood, Blackfoot and River Crow Indians as follows:

"Commencing at the NW corner of Dakota, being the intersection of the forty-ninth parallel of N. latitude and the one-hundred and fourth meridian of W. longitude; thence S. to the S. bank of the Missouri river; thence up and along the S. bank of said river to a point opposite the mouth of Medicine or Sun river; thence in a westerly direction, following the S. bank of said Medicine or Sun river, as far as practicable, to the summit of the main range of the Rocky Mountains; thence along said summit in a northerly direction to the northern boundary of Montana; thence along said N. boundary to the place of beginning, excepting and reserving therefrom existing military reservations." <sup>196</sup>

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196. Kappeler, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 855-856.

(See map. Nos. 565 and 574 indicate the reserve set aside.)

With the consummation of this treaty, the Blackfeet withdrew to condensed areas, and were thereafter restricted to the assigned reserve.

## Chapter XIV

### WESTWARD EXPANSION -- LAND CESSIONS OF THE BLACKFEET

With the expansion of the West and the development of the cattle business and the agricultural interest the quest for land increased rapidly and the demands of the whites became more imperative for the reduction of the Indian lands. Memorials to Congress from territorial legislatures, and complaints to the Indian Commissioners mark a stage in frontier development where the settler found his chance for expansion checked by the lines of Indian reserves.

As stated in the former chapter, the treaty of July 6, 1873, established a definite reserve for the Blackfeet, the southwest boundary of which was the Sun and Missouri rivers. Urged by the demands of the West, Congress the

next year, restricted the Blackfeet still further by moving<sup>197</sup>  
the line northward from the Sun to the Marias river.

This treaty was approved April 15, 1874. (See map. No.  
565 indicates the Blackfoot reserve. No. 574 is the de-  
ducted territory.) The eastern part of this was reserved  
for the Gros Ventres and River Crows.

By Executive Order of August 19, 1874, the President  
restored to the public domain No. 574 which was not embraced<sup>198</sup>  
by Act of Congress on April 15, 1874.

Thus we shall see that by these treaties the govern-  
ment took from them all the land between the Sun and the<sup>199</sup>  
Marias Rivers, which included their best hunting grounds  
on the Teton, for which they gave them nothing but the  
annuities mentioned. Not only did these orders take away  
their lands, but they left the reservation buildings out-<sup>200</sup>  
side the reservation. During the fall of 1877 the  
agency was removed from the Teton River to Badger Creek,

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197. Stat. L. 43rd Cong. 1st Sess. 1874, Chap. 96, p.  
22-23. See also Royce, Charles, op. cit., vol. 2,  
p. 574.

198. Kaypler, op. cit., p. 366, vol.

199. Report of Comm. of Indian Affairs, 1874, 43rd Cong.  
2nd Sess. vol. 1, p. 368. "The law approved April  
15, 1874, establishing a reservation for certain  
Indians in Montana Territory is an act of gross  
injustice to the Indians and ought to be amended  
as to make the south bank of the Teton the south-  
ern boundary of the reserve. To take a large portion  
of their best hunting grounds without consultation  
or remuneration, is a violation of the Christian  
policy of the government."

200. 45th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 1800) H. R. Doc. 1877-78.  
vol. 8, p. 527.

within the new boundaries of the reserve, about sixty miles from the Canadian line.

In accordance with the plan of gathering the various tribes on large reservations where they might be the more easily taken care of, and also later opening more land to entry, President Grant by executive order on April 13, 1875, made an addition to the reservation as follows: "Commencing at a point on the Musselshell River where the same is intersected by the forty-seventh parallel of north latitude; thence east with said parallel to the south bank of Yellowstone River; thence down and with the south bank of said river to the south boundary of the military reservation at Fort Buford; thence along the south boundary of said military reservation to its western boundary; thence north along said western boundary to the south bank of the Missouri River; thence up and with the south bank of said river to the mouth of the Musselshell; thence up the middle of main channel of said Musselshell River to the place of beginning, be, and at the same time is, withdrawn from sale, and set apart as an addition to the present reservation for the Gros Ventre, Pigeon, Blood, Blackfoot and Crow Indians." U. S. Grant. (See map. Nos. 622 and 623 constitute the additional reserve.)

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201. Kappeler, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 336.

202. Charles Hayes, op. cit., pt. 2, p. 40.

The country comprising this additional<sup>land</sup>/originally belonged partly to the Assiniboina and partly to the Crows. The Crows ceded their rights May 7, 1868. The Assiniboina ceded their claims by treaty of 1866, which was never ratified, but the efficacy of which was admitted by the government so far as the cession of land was concerned, by assigning them a future home on the Blackfeet reservation.

Although the Blackfeet Reservation was increased by the executive order of April 13, 1875, nearly all the increase was restored to the public domain by executive order<sup>203</sup> of July 13, 1880. (See map. No. 622 indicates the territory restored to public domain.)

"Still to the white man's wants there is no end! He said, 'beyond those hills he would not come'. But to the westward sees his hands extend, Ere yet his promise dies upon his tongue."

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203. Kappeler, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 586.

## Chapter XV

### LAST FRONTIER OF THE BLACKFEET

To the whites of the eighties in Montana, the danger from the Blackfeet was a passing one, for the Indian himself was passing. The inertia of the Indian Bureau in Washington and the inefficiency and corruption<sup>204</sup> of the force in the field probably worked as well as any conscious policy in bringing about a subjection of the Indian;<sup>205</sup> for it amounted to pacification by starvation and

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204. Granville Stuart, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 151-53. "At this time the management of our Indian affairs was about as bad as it could well be . . . The annual appropriations of the government for several years has been ample to board everyone of the agency Indians at a first class hotel . . . These appropriations becoming so thin and emaciated, that when they do finally reach the Indian they are like the darkie's fish, "all swamp up"."
205. 49th Cong. 2nd Sess. H. Ex. Doc. (Ser. 2297) Report of Sec. of Interior, vol. 2, p. 151, 1894. "The Indians stripped the bark from the saplings that grew along the creek and ate the inner portion to appease their gnawing hunger. H. A. Allen, Agt."

neglect. The younger and more adventurous braves, who, in 1880 and 1881 had ridden out to hunt the bison as their fathers had done before them, were by 1883, wandering in starving bands on their reservation, and during the winter of that year approximately one-third of them died of starvation in consequence of the sudden extinction of the bison coincident with a reduction of rations. (See chapter VIII.)

By 1883 the bison and other wild game were so scarce on the Blackfoot reservation that either the Indian must be fed by the government or starve. The real condition of these Indians appears to have been misrepresented to the Department at Washington. The agent in charge at this time had reported to the Indian Bureau that the Blackfeet were practically self-supporting, and needed few supplies. As a result of this report, appropriations for them were small. This statement was wholly false. The Blackfeet had at that time done practically nothing toward self-support except to kill the bison, which had supplied practically all his needs. In a moment without warning the Indians had been deprived of their food supply upon which they had depended. The men devoted themselves to hunting smaller game, but in spite of their best efforts the Blackfeet began to starve. News of their plight was sent to Washington, and Congress



ordered appropriations to relieve their distress; but the supplies had to be freighted in wagons about two hundred miles before they were available. Had the Blackfeet been obliged to depend on the supplies authorized by the Indian Bureau, the whole tribe would doubtless have perished. Fortunately, assistance was nearer. The people of Montana and the officers stationed at Fort Shaw came to their aid with supplies, and gradually the suffering was relieved; but the starving time was one long remembered by the Blackfeet.

True, a government farm had been established for them in 1858, but apparently the farming done was limited to small garden patches, and few even of these. In 1878, their agent reported: "Some of the most influential chiefs set an example to the rest by going into the field and working themselves, instead of simply stand-<sup>206</sup> ing by and seeing their squaws work." In 1882, he reported, "In all the work the agency requires the Indians are an efficient help, such as cutting and hauling fire-wood, also saw-logs from the mountains. Our hay crop will be about one-hundred tons." In 1884 the agent<sup>207</sup> reported "fifty-one acres cultivated by the government,

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206. Report of Sec. of Interior, 1879, p. 197. 46th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 1910) H. Ex. Doc. Vol. 9.

207. Report of Sec. of Interior, 48th Cong. 2nd Sess. 1884 (Ser. 2287) H. Ex. Doc. vol. 12, p. 354.

and three acres by the Blackfeet."

The tribal standard was one of hunting, with agriculture as an incidental and rather degrading feature. Few of these dusky wards of the government had any recognition of individual ownership, and their former system did not permit of personal economic development.

Long before the tribes were condensed upon reservations, it was foreseen that the Indian could not be civilized and enabled to cope with individualistic neighbors until the communal influences of the tribe could be broken down. Embued with the idea of breaking down the tribal autonomy then, the Commissioners of Indian Affairs urged upon Congress a policy that would throw the Indians upon their own resources.

This was brought about in 1887 by the Dawes Act which provided for ownership of lands in severalty by the Indians, and marked a great step toward solidifying Indian civilization. This allotment in severalty gave to the head of the family one hundred and sixty acres of land; to each child over eighteen years of age eighty acres; to each child under eighteen years of age, forty acres.

At this time the Blackfeet, Piegan, Blood, Gros Ventres, and River Crow still held a vast expanse of territory embracing over twenty-one million acres, which were occupied by less than ten thousand Indians, of which

203

2300 were Blackfeet. This was considered by Congress to be wholly out of proportion to the number of Indians residing thereon, and greatly in excess of the present or prospective want; also the Indians were desirous of disposing of much of their land in order to obtain the means to enable them to become self-supporting as a pastoral people, and to educate their children.

Thus it came about that on February 11, 1867, a treaty<sup>208</sup> was consummated between these tribes and the United States Government by which approximately seventeen million acres were ceded to the Government, and the various tribes were given permanent homes upon separate reservations.<sup>210</sup>

By this treaty,<sup>211</sup> which was ratified by Congress May 1, 1868, the Blackfeet were to receive \$150,000 annually for a period of ten years, when government

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208. Report of Sec. of Interior, 45th Cong. 2nd Sess. (Ser. 2827) H. Ex. Doc. Vol. 12, 1884, p. 292.

209. Kappler, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 286.

210. Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs for year 1867, p. 132. Blackfoot Agency, Aug. 1867. "On February, 1867, the Indian Commissioners, John V. Wright, Dr. Daniels, and Major C. F. Larrabee, came to this agency to treat with these Indians for a reduction of their reservation. They consummated a treaty which, if ratified by Congress, will open to the public upwards of seven million acres of land, the reservation remaining to these Indians being a strip about forty miles in width, and extending from Birch Creek on the south to the international boundary." Baldwin, Agt.

211. Kappler, op. cit., p. 281.

support was to be withdrawn. This sum was a good deal more than required for their subsistence, but by the terms of the treaty, the surplus, over and above that required for food and clothing, was to be used in furnishing to the Indians farming implements, seed, live stock, and such other things as would help them to become self-supporting. This treaty also provided for the education of Indian children, procuring medicine . . . erection of new agencies . . . mills . . . etc.

By this treaty of May 1, 1888, the future home of the once powerful Blackfoot Nation was reduced to <sup>212</sup> the following boundaries: Beginning at a point in the middle of the main channel of the Marias River opposite the mouth of Cut Bank Creek; thence up Cut Bank Creek, in the middle of the main channel thereof, twenty miles following the meanderings of the creek; thence due north to the northern boundary of Montana; thence west along said boundary to the summit of the main chain of the Rocky Mountains; thence in a southerly direction along the summit of said mountains to a point due west from the source of the North Fork of Birch Creek; thence due east to the source of said North Fork, thence down said North Fork <sup>Y</sup> to the main

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212. Stat. L. 50th Cong. Sess. 1, Chs. 213, p. 189.

stream of Birch Creek, in the middle of the main channel thereof, to the Marias River; thence down the Marias River, in the middle of the main channel thereof, to the place of beginning. (See map. No. 695 indicated Blackfoot Reservation.)

The last vestige of the Blackfoot Indian frontier was gone. No longer would the whites of Montana find their chances for economic expansion checked by the lines of the Blackfoot reserve. No longer could the Blackfeet run the bison on the vast uninhabited plains; no longer would the government deal with any Indian tribe as an independent nation; rather, by the force of circumstances described in this paper, the Blackfeet, broken subdued, stripped of their power, driven from their hunting grounds, and reduced to helpless wards, must accept the reservation.

"Where is my home--my prairie home? the proud land  
of my sires?  
Where stands the tepees of my pride? where gleams  
the council fires?  
Where are my fathers' hallowed graves? my friends  
so brave and free?  
Gone, gone--forever from my view! Great Spirit  
can it be?"

## Chapter XVI

### SUMMARY

While the coming of the white man did not result in the extermination of the Blackfeet, it did bring about his subjection. This has ever been the case when a more efficient civilization has come in contact with a less cultural group. For example may be cited the conquest of Peru by the Spaniards, or the subjection of India by the English. The subjection of a race has always been accompanied by ruthless warfare. The winning of the west from the American Indian was no exception to the rule.

The subjection of the Blackfeet meant the breaking away from all that is natural to them; the giving up of inherited habits and the formation of new ones--the reversal of their whole mode of existence. With the advent

of the horse and the firearms, both of which were introduced to the Indian by the white man, a great change was brought about in their mode of life. During the era of the fur trade we nearly exterminated the beaver, and this era was followed later by the extinction of the bison which made the Blackfoot dependent upon the white brother. Little by little the Indian relinquished his former methods of life, acquiring new wants, becoming corrupted by new vices and drifting into that relationship with the United States Government which is known in history as the Indian Question.

Later still, the development of the railroad facilitated the deliveries of the essentials of life to the far distant Blackfoot reserve. But the construction of every mile of western railroad lessened the Indian's capacity for resistance and increased the government's ability to repress it. The Northern Pacific, the Union Pacific, and numerous private roads were perhaps the real forces that subjugated the Indian and brought peace upon the western plains.

The reservation method of handling the Blackfoot was probably the only feasible one. The protection that it afforded, doubtless saved the Indian from extermination. For without its establishment, the Indian would have been forced to withstand the west-

ward march of white millions--an utter impossibility--or of being killed or assimilated by them.

The reserve system separated the Blackfeet from most of the land that had been theirs and which was opened for settlement to the whites. Reservation life, it was hoped, would bring the Blackfeet to a closer contiguity of the white man's standard of living. Pursuant to this plan an attempt was made to teach them agriculture, habits of industry and economy, and various mechanical arts.

However, the reservation system in many instances reduced the Blackfeet to great dependence upon the whites, for by limiting their territory, it also limited their ability to sustain themselves by hunting. This together with the sterility of the region to which they had been assigned made it necessary for the Blackfeet to be subsisted by the government. The assurance of such maintenance at times doubtless led to deliberate shiftlessness on the part of the Indians, while the middlemen who handled the Indian goods often grossly cheated the Blackfeet and the government.

The influence of the church was a power for good and of inestimable value upon the reservation in the inculcation of Christian ideals and pointed the way toward the blessings of peace. Although St. Peter's



mission was not permanently established until 1859, it contributed to the reconciliation of warring factions of Plains Indians, while the mission school set up under its auspices prepared the children of the Blackfeet for the next step forward in the march of Progress.

Upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which has been a part of the Department of the Interior since 1849, much censure has been passed, and not wholly without cause, for the spoils system came into absolute control of the agencies, and fitness and experience received little consideration. There appears to have been but little system and no fixed and recognized procedure. A perusal of the reports shows haphazard management. No treaty that it was possible to devise could stand. Probably the majority of the agents were men of average integrity, but there were many whose first considerations were wholly personal. The Indian Department appears to have failed to understand the true conditions of the Blackfeet. The encroachments of the settlers constantly increased. Appropriations were usually inadequate. The supplies were often short and of an inferior grade. One instance may be noted in the reduction of rations in the winter of 1883-84, the starving time of the Piegan.

The policy of the government, in so far as it has been

able to control this course of unavoidable change, has always been the highest good of the Indian. While it was powerless to keep intact the Indian's lands or to preserve his customs from extinction, it has ever striven to mitigate an unhappy situation and attempted to secure liberal restitution for an irreparable loss. The failures of the Government have not been those of purpose, but rather inability to carry its purpose into effect.

On the other hand the Blackfeet seem never to have reached a point where they could comprehend the full meaning of a treaty. They also lacked the inclinations for enforcing one. The chiefs might profess conversion and even friendship; but let a grudge arise or the tomahawk come out again, and these chiefs could not control their riotous young Indians. Whether did they recognize a tribal government competent to bind by its actions all the members of the tribe. They never acknowledged that any man could own land. Land to the Blackfoot was an airy thing with air, free to all, used for an existence by hunting and roid.

This all illustrates what history has proven in all conflicts between higher and lower types--the Blackfeet were doomed to pass because they had outlived

their period as a race in the history of humanity.

Huddled together about their agency in a small corner of the great territory which they once dominated, a few Blackfeet still exist, the pitiful remnant of a once mighty people. They are groping between the old and the new order, striving to comprehend things; to break away from all that is natural to them; to become civilized. The old generation is dying, and with its passing will go also the ancient customs and tribal life. And then, without the haunting background of the freedom that was, the younger generation will perhaps go forward more rapidly. Will they rise by absorption or sink by extinction? Who shall say?

In closing this thesis I shall quote the concluding entreaty of all Blackfoot speeches: "Mokokitki-achaminat!" (Be wise and persevere!)

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